Guitar & Bass NOVEMBER 2014

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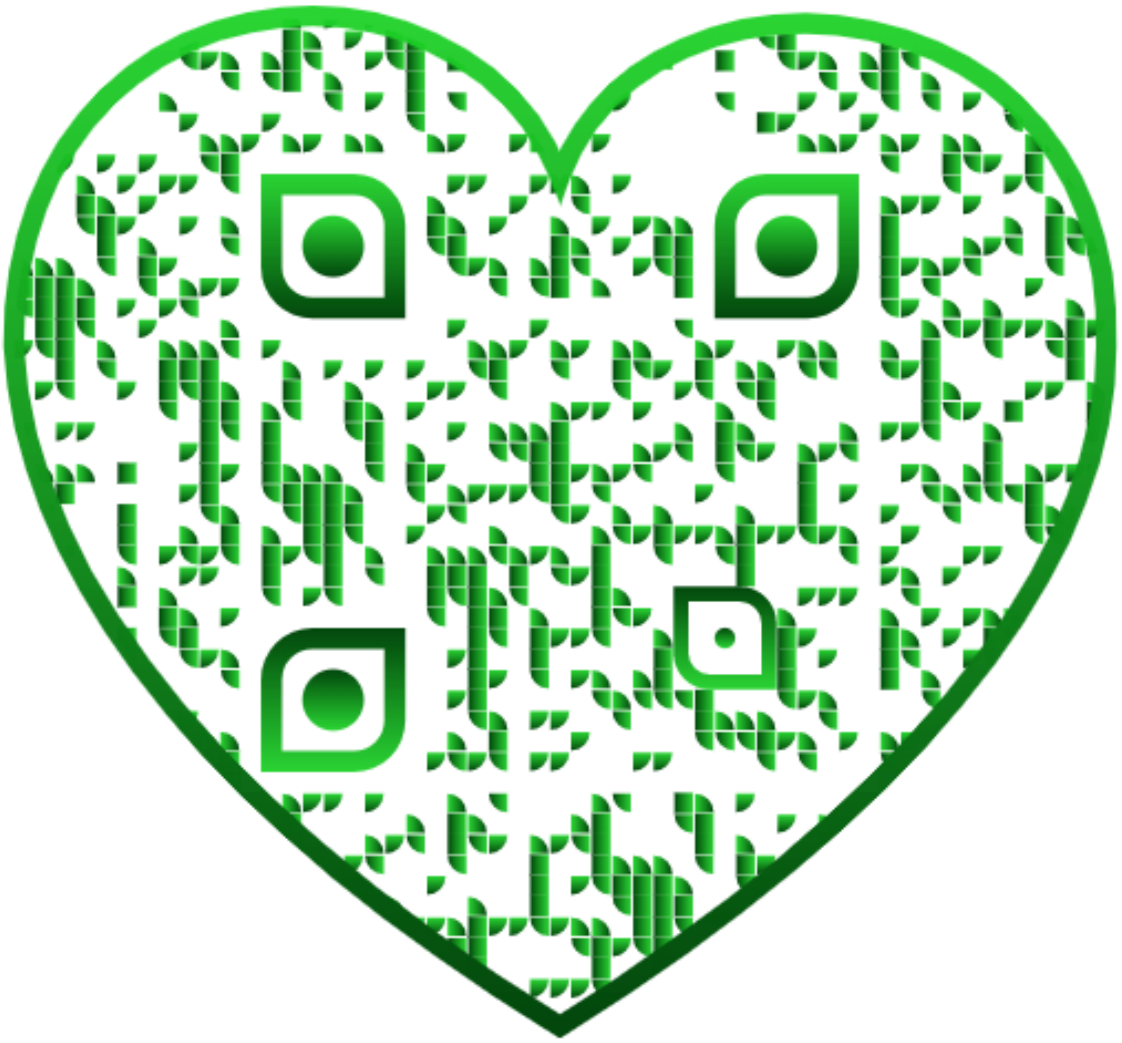

CADILLAC IN MODEL "A" THE WORLD IS YOURS THAT'LL BE THE DAY PEGGY SUE
BABY BLUE LA BAMBA APACHE
LET'S GO TRIPPIN' TRICK BAG
WALK, DON'T RUN MISIRLOU
I FOUGHT THE LAW SURFIN' U.S.A.
HELP ME RHONDA NOWHERE MAN
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ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE
KICK OUT THE JAMS F.B.I.
ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER
THE NIGHT THEY DROVE OLD DIXIE DOWN
BELL BOTTOM BLUES PROUD MARY
WHAT IS LIFE LAYLA
SMOKE ON THE WATER
REELIN' IN THE YEARS
SUPERFLY THAT LADY
YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET
SWEET HOME ALABAMA MONEY
TOO ROLLING STONED
DIXIE CHICKEN MAGIC MAN
CARRY ON MY WAYWARD SON
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BEAST OF BURDEN BAD PENNY
FLY LIKE AN EAGLE
SULTANS OF SWING
WONDERFUL TONIGHT LE FREAK
MY SHARONA LIMELIGHT
COMFORTABLY NUMB
RUN TO THE HILLS MANEATER
ELEPHANT TALK LENNY
PRIDE (IN THE NAME OF LOVE)
OWNER OF A LONELY HEART
CUTS LIKE A KNIFE
ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER
BIG LOG
YOU GIVE LOVE A BAD NAME
BLACK STAR
PRIDE AND JOY
SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER
SEE A LITTLE LIGHT
SLOW TURNING
FINISH WHAT YA STARTED
SMOKING GUN TUFF ENUFF
SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT
CLIFFS OF DOVER
ENDLESS, NAMELESS
DAMN RIGHT I'VE GOT THE BLUES
WICKED GAME COMEDOWN
SHOW ME HOW TO LIVE
SWALLOWED
BLUE ON BLACK
ALIVE NO RAIN
SCAR TISSUE
MAPS GRAVITY
BULLET WITH BUTTERFLY WINGS
I BET YOU LOOK GOOD ON THE DANCEFLOOR
DAMMIT LAST NITE
DIVINIATIONS ABEL
BEVERLY HILLS
'TIL SUMMER COMES AROUND
FORGET YOU
GET LUCKY BLACK CHANDELIER
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The good kind of global warming

Regardless of your age, chances are the guitar has been a major part of the music landscape from as far back as you can remember. So it seems strange to think that, once upon a time, that wasn't always the case; way back when, it was just another instrument, with no higher a profile than plenty of others. The idea of the guitar as a Johnny-come-lately which has kicked other contenders to the relative musical hinterlands is a strange one, and our cover feature is all about how the instrument we love made its way across the globe and became a world-changing force of nature.

Once, we hope, you've enjoyed reading about the journey of the guitar, you'll appreciate all the more the equipment on offer this issue in our reviews section. Gear from the likes of Burns, B3 and Seymour Duncan all get a thorough going-over in your best interests. Elsewhere we have a Member of Parliament's guitar collection (yes, you read that right), and Phil Harris finds that often there's neither rhyme nor reason to someone's desire to own a guitar. Brian Setzer, J Mascis, Midge Ure and Hilton Valentine make for a wise and eclectic mix of interviewees.

We'll take up no more of your time now, so that you can get on with proceedings. We hope that this – and as many visits to www.guitar-bass.net as you wish – will keep your guitar-lovin' motor running until the next issue. Enjoy...

John

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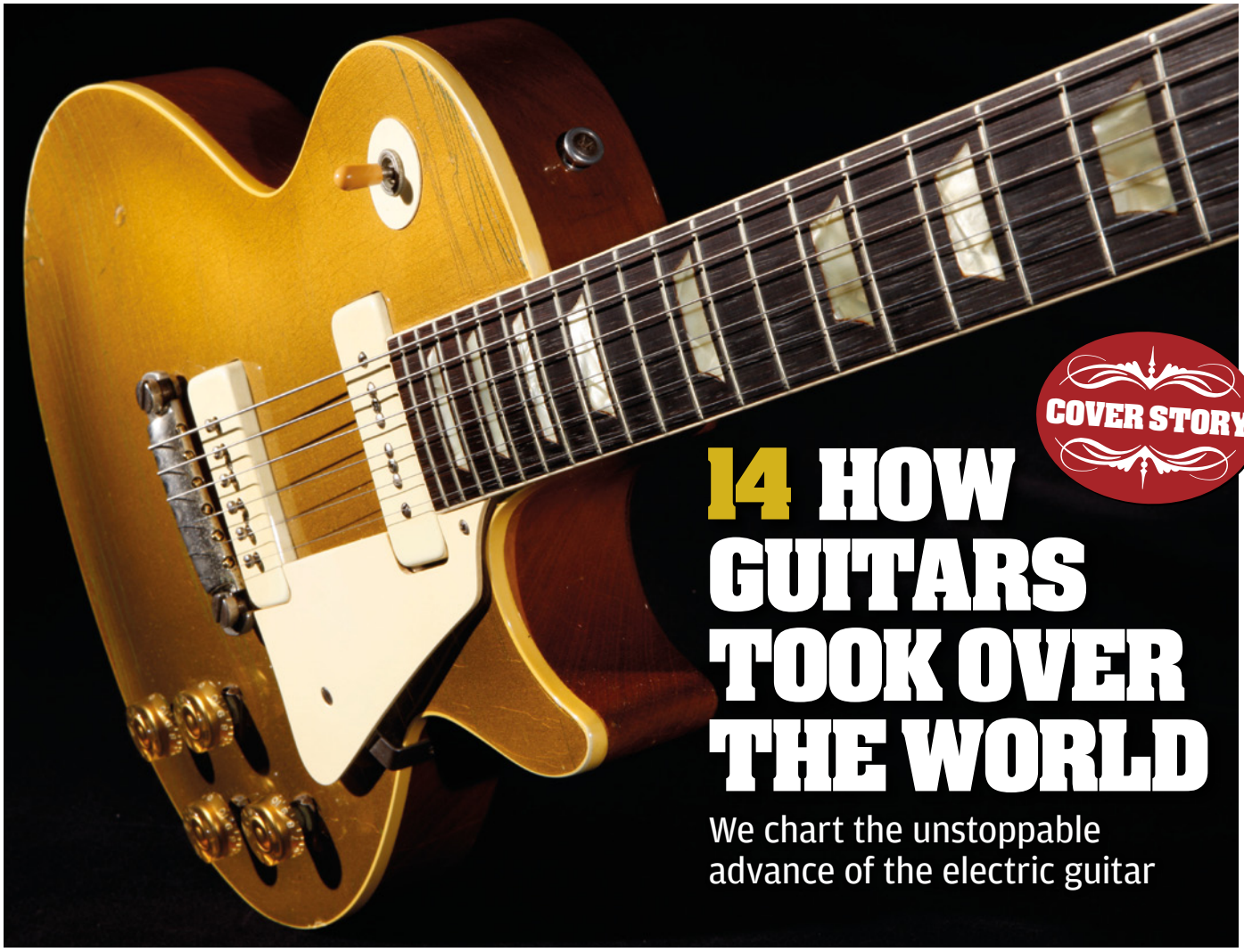

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STAR LETTER

TAKING THE STAGE

Thought I would drop you a line to show you my handiwork. I have been playing the guitar for years but have, over the last few months, increasingly been using MainStage on my Apple Mac. As you know, MainStage is a very powerful recording/production tool which can be used for various guitar effects and virtual amplifiers. Now, one of the great things about MainStage is that it can emulate just about any amplifier known to the world – and this is where my problem began. I have a foot controller that I can use to turn various things on and off (such as stompboxes), but when it comes to controlling an amplifier I had to use the mouse, which when you have a guitar around your neck is a pain. So I went looking for a MIDI controller that would do the job, and found there wasn't one to be had – so I built one.

Using a Livid Brain Jr (check out its website for some great DIY stuff), some planks of wood I had in the garage and some other found and bought stuff, it took about a month to complete. Each control on the box is mapped to a control in MainStage, so as I change the control on the box, the equivalent MainStage control changes... simple! I use LePou plug-ins (again check the website for some great free plug-ins) – and these provide very realistic emulations of some great amps, from Engl to Marshall. For the sake of looks I built it to look like an amplifier head, so that if and when I use it on stage no-one knows that it is basically controlling a laptop in the background. Next stop for me is *Dragons' Den* – I need £100,000 investment to get this to the market... and £60,000 for me to spend on a nice new relic guitar.

Paul Williams *via email*

Paul Williams' MIDI controller: from the garage to the world?

G&B **You've got to admire such ingenuity – and we do Paul. We'll be rooting for you, if you ever make on to *Dragons' Den*... that would be such essential television. We'll reward your efforts with Star Letter status because we think you deserve it, and the idea that we don't want to annoy you so that you turn your attention to building a death ray has no substance whatsoever...**

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ALWAYS A TULL MOMENT

I've just been reading the September issue. A brilliant read and I especially enjoyed the well-balanced piece on relics. I used to be very much an anti-relic person, believing that if one buys a new guitar it ought to look like a new guitar. Surely part of the attraction of a brand new axe – the magic of the aspirational, gorgeous, shiny, beautifully finished and jewel-like thing that is a good, new guitar – is the rich colours, the lovingly applied and polished lacquer, the immaculate binding and the gleaming hardware.

But then comes the paranoia. Do you take your gleaming new guitar to a gig? If you don't, have you wasted hundreds of pounds on something you daren't use? And that first, heartbreaking ding. I remember backing my new Gibson SG Standard into the bolt on the gate at the top of my attic steps. The angst, the sorrow, the wishing I could turn back time and not do it! Of course, once the reality of the first ding has sunk in, it becomes part of the history of the guitar and now, eight years later, I'm quite proud of the little signs of age that are starting to appear around the neck binding and some of the edges of the lacquer.

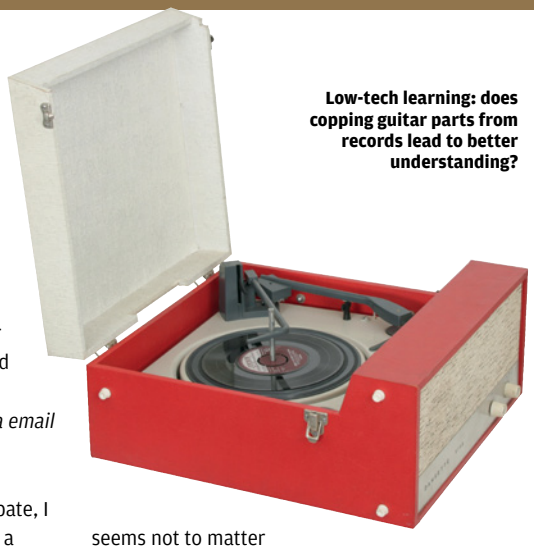
I recently bought my first pre-aged guitar. Not actually new, but as new, which is to say that it has fake wear, a matt finish (since treated to T-cut to make it look less fake) and rusty tuners. It's a JHS Vintage Icon VS6 (SG) MRMA Mick Abrahams signature. As a long time Tull fan and a recent convert to the Blodwyn Pig and Mick Abrahams Band camp, as well as not owning a guitar with twin P90s, it seemed a good buy. So it proved – it's excellent, as I've come to expect from Trevor Wilkinson's Vintage and Fret-King brands. Thing is, I don't feel that I have to treat it, like I still do with my SG, with kid gloves as it already looks (from a distance) as if it's been around the block.

My second pre-aged guitar is my latest acquisition – the actual JHS Vintage V6 'Blackie' that Mick Abrahams has been using for slide work

– straight from, and signed by, the man himself. Okay, it's a Fender copy (albeit a good one) and apart from the signature it's no different from any other Vintage V6 Icon series. But It Belonged To Mick Abrahams! Now that really is a bit of history. And quite a bit of the wear and tear on this one is real!

So: Relic/not relic? Whatever floats your boat. I see merits in both sides, but no need for argument.

Keith Bennett *via email*



Low-tech learning: does copping guitar parts from records lead to better understanding?

OLD FOR NEW

To add my humble opinion to the relics debate, I recently upgraded my Squier Telecaster to a Fender Classic Baja Telecaster and part of the joy was taking ownership of my own pristine, new, 'straight from the box' guitar.

To see it sitting on the stand shiny and new is part of the buying experience for me. It will age of its own accord as the years go by. I speak as one whose first 'real' guitar was an Eko 12-string acoustic that I got the best part of 50 years ago. I can assure you it now has that aged look and all the bumps and bruises come from all the various experiences we have had together through the years. As always it is personal preference that determines what you are looking for. Keep up the good work and keep the debates coming!

Leslie Harrison *via email*

DANSETTE DAYS

Sid Bishop's column is always one of the first articles I read in the magazine, with his wistfully nostalgic observations on the post-'50s popular music scene always being an entertaining read. This month's (October 2014) item on initial learning and practice is no exception. I well remember the 'Dansette Days' of repeatedly lifting the stylus.

To add a little to his comments, beginners today also have a fine selection of affordable, and especially playable instruments at their disposal. I, along with thousands of others I suppose, remember struggling with unnamed Spanish guitars, banana-necked Rosetti guitars and the like. I thought I'd made it when I got a Watkins Rapier. My first Strat was still a way in the distance.

So it is, I think, easier to get started now than it was back in the '60s, but it seems to me that a lot of younger players do seem to have learned from the same Youtube offering, which is copied very well and played at lightning speed… but then that seems to be 'it'. We may ask, 'What else can you play?' to be met with a blank stare. Any mention of chords or accompaniment to songs seems not to matter too much. And that is where the 'Dansette' method of learning can be inadvertently educational as we listen to every part over and over, not just 'our' part taken out of context.

Don't get me wrong, a good teacher can save so much time, but learning by yourself or with your mates is just so much fun. And that's what it's all about.

Martin Scott *via email*

G&B **Many a record needle has been ruined in the pursuit of getting that part just exactly right. And long may the tradition continue.**

THE CRACKS APPEAR

Well, you asked for jokes, in the Oct 14 issue. Don't say you haven't been warned…

1. What do you call a French chicken that plays guitar? Les Poule…

2. Why did the guitar tech get the sack? He just wasn't truss worthy…

3. When the rumours of Paul McCartney's death were circulating the rest of the Beatles said they were bass-less…

4. How was Buddy Holly able to write such timeless classics? It was in his D & A…

I'll stop for now, but if you don't send me the Relic Fender Stratocaster you reviewed in the last issue by return of post then I will keep sending more 'jokes'!!

Roger Fowles *via email*

G&B **You don't scare us, Roger. We aren't afraid of any thing you can throw at us. Can you do better (and we're open to debate as to regards what 'better' means) than Roger?**

Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

Alternative Fender

Fender has been tinkering with its time-honoured designs to come up with divergent new takes on some classic instruments

There's always a barrage of vintage-correct models emerging from Fender, so it's good to see that the Big F is still trying to push the boundaries just a little. New limited editions of the American Standard Stratocaster (above right) and Telecaster (both £1,498.80) showcase their new compound-radius fingerboard. Known as the 'Channel Bound' models, these guitars have a fingerboard inlaid into the neck to create a distinctive fretting-hand feel in which both edges are comfortably rounded with no side seam between neck and fretboard. The fingerboard graduates smoothly from a modern 9.5" radius at the nut, suitable for chording, to a more flattened 14" radius near the body to enable slicker soloing without string-choking.

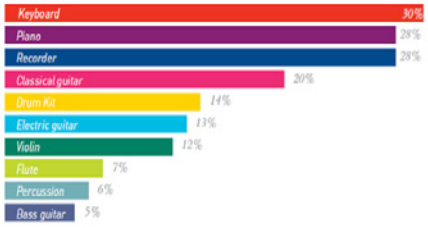
Another unusual guitar is the Classic Player Triple Tele (£826.80, above centre), designed by Custom Shop Master Builder Todd Krause, which rocks three slanted Nocaster single-coil bridge pickups operated via five-way Stratocaster-style switching for a distinctive modern tone. These are paired with a one-piece maple neck/fingerboard with a thick C-shaped neck profile.

The new Classic Player Strat HH (£838.80, above right) stands apart due to its dual Wide Range Special humbuckers which can be coil-split to give five sounds. The maple neck is profiled to a '60s C shape and is capped with a bound rosewood fingerboard. The finish is a dark Mercedes blue, matched on the '70s-style oversize headstock.

Also new is the 35W Vintage Modified Series '68 Custom Vibrolux Reverb silverface amp (£1522.80). Deviations from the original spec include reverb and tremolo on both channels, and the Custom channel has a modified Bassman tone stack that gives modern players greater tonal flexibility with pedals. As ever, www.fender.com has all the specs.

Kids' electric guitar lessons boom

ABRSM, the examination board of the Royal Schools of Music, has carried out extensive research to assess the state of children's music tuition in the UK. One of the findings of its Making Music report reveals that amongst the 5-17 year-old budding musicians questioned, those taking electric guitar lessons have risen from 1% to 13% in just five years. Keyboard (30%) piano (28%) and recorder (28%) are still the most popular but classical guitar is also doing well (20%) and drummers (14%) and bass guitarists (5%) should be in decent supply in the future too; see the graph below. The interest in music seems to be higher than ever across the board with 76% of children aged 5 to 14 saying they could play an instrument compared with 41% in 1999. Go to www.abrsm.org/makingmusic to review all of the report's findings.



ROCK'N'ROLL FANTASY CAMP

Offering the opportunity to play, record and write songs with rock legends has been the work of Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp for 18 years, and the latest dates and famous names in the frame have just been released. All events will take place in the USA and last for four days. The highlight for guitarists must be the 15-18 January camp at Foxwoods Resort, Conn with rockstar 'counsellors' Joe Perry, Steve Morse, Lou Gramm (Foreigner) and Bumblefoot ($5,995 not including accommodation), although the 5-9 March camp featuring Pat Travers and Sammy Hagar sounds none too shoddy, either. There will be six camps in total and other counsellors will include Roger Daltrey, Lita Ford and Rick Derringer. See www.rockcamp.com for more.

Routemaster Strat

We reported last month that Fender are sponsoring the No. 24 heritage London bus route as a joint 60th anniversary celebration of both the Strat and the famous double-decker Routemaster bus. To show they're well and truly onboard Fender have engineered a special Routemaster Strat complete with a seat material-matching moquette design pickguard, an inlaid Transport For London Roundel emblem on the head and an anniversary engraving on the neckplate. There will only be 25 made and some of these are available for purchase from the London Transport Museum at £899. Go to www.ltmuseumshop.co.uk.

GLENN CORNICK 1947-2014

Bassist Glenn Cornick, best known for his work with Jethro Tull, has died at the age of 67. Born in Cumbria, Cornick started on guitar aged 15, but soon switched to bass. After moving to Blackpool, he met flautist and frontman Ian Anderson and joined the band that was by 1967 to become Jethro Tull. Cornick played on the first three Tull albums *This Was, Stand Up* and *Benefit*, bringing his solid, grooving, unison-riffing, jazz-infused walking bass and even some technically demanding bass solos to the eccentric sonic brew that characterised the band's output. He played a Gibson EB-3 and his famed modified Precision, proving himself an innovative talent whilst helping the band forge their unique sound. Glenn was fired from 'Tull in 1970 with no reason ever being given for his release. He went on to form Wild Turkey and in later years was a regular at Jethro Tull conventions, bringing his renowned gusto and bravado to these lively performances. Ian Anderson has led the tributes, recalling how Cornick's broad musical knowledge helped mould Jethro Tull's unique musical brew and acknowledging his huge impact on the band's early shows due to his infectiously raucous onstage presence.

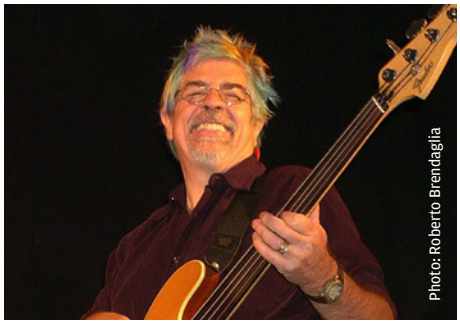


Photo: Roberto Brendaglia

Photo: Ben Farrow Photography

Britain's biggest band

Deep Purple's Ian Gillan fronted 3,325 musicians for a rendition of *Smoke On The Water* on Lyme Regis beach in Dorset on 6 September, setting a new British record for the biggest number of guitarists playing simultaneously. When Gillan came on the stage the crowd erupted, and they certainly raised a little sand as they all played that classic opening riff. 'It's an ideal song,' commented Guitars On The Beach organiser Geoff Baker. 'It features one of the best-known classic rock riffs of all time, and it's fairly easy to play. To hear 3,325 guitarists playing the riff together was surreal!' With idyllic weather the scene was set, and as the band played *Smoke On The Water* a fleet of boats fired off smoke grenades and orange flares. Other artists played all day, and record attempts also included *Rave On* performed by Billy Geraghty and *Rocking All Over The World* fronted by our own Lars Mullen.

'We collected close to £7000 for charities,' explains Baker, 'and never on any occasion did I hear a raised voice or a moan... it was smiles all day. We are all ready looking at top artists for next year, which is promising to be a huge event.' Go over to www.guitarsonthebeach.co.uk for all the details.

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21 OCTOBER - 4 NOVEMBER
The legendary prog six-string virtuoso brings his Genesis Revisited world tour home to the UK
WHERE? **12 dates across the country**
TICKETS **From £27.50**
CONTACT **wwww.hackettsongs.com**

Ian Siegal & Jimbo Mathus
7-15 NOVEMBER
One of Britain's finest blues frontmen tours as a duo with the lauded Mississippian multi-instrumentalist
WHERE? **Nine shows, Edinburgh to Southampton**
TICKETS **From £8.80**
CONTACT **www.iansiegal.com**

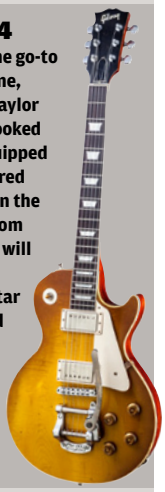
Carlisle Blues & Rock Festival
7-9 NOVEMBER
Ian Siegal & Jimbo Mathus, Aynsley Lister, Climax Blues Band, Mike Zito & The Wheel, The Boom Band feat. Marcus Bonfanti, Jon Amor and Matt Taylor
WHERE? **Swallow Hilltop Hotel, Carlisle**
TICKETS **Day tickets from £31, £99.50 for weekend, from £191.50 with room, breakfast and dinner inc.**
CONTACT **www.carlisleblуesfestival.com**

Ilfracombe Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival
14-16 NOVEMBER
Martin Turner's Wishbone Ash, Geno Washington, Climax Blues Band, Aynsley Lister, Larry Miller...
WHERE? **John Fowler Ilfracombe Holiday Park**
TICKETS **From £119 inc. chalet or bungalow**
CONTACT **www.ilfracombebluesfestival.co.uk**

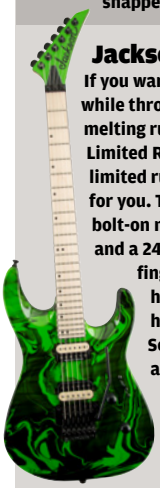
NEWS IN BRIEF

Robert 'Throb' Young 1965-2014
Known to most simply as 'Throb', Robert Young has died at his home in Brighton aged just 49. Young joined Primal Scream on bass in the early 1980s, teaming up with schoolfriends frontman Billy Gillespie and guitarist Jim Beattie. When Beattie left, Young switched to six-string alongside new co-guitarist Andrew Innes. An unexpected side-step into the acid-house rave culture of the late '80s resulted in the breakthrough single *Loaded* and album *Screamadelica* in 1990. The follow up *Give Out But Don't Give Up* saw Young take to a Les Paul and deliver some classic guitar riffage, most notably on the hit single *Rocks*, sealing his reputation as the band's true rock'n'roller. He left for a sabbatical in 2006 due to 'personal problems', never to return. The huge outpouring of tributes from his peers reveal him to be one of the most loved musicians of his generation.

LP Collectors Choice #14
Session ace Waddy Wachtel was the go-to man for the likes of Jackson Browne, Carole King, Stevie Nicks, James Taylor and many more – and when you booked Waddy, you booked his Bigsby-equipped 1960 Les Paul. Gibson have honoured this instrument by making it #14 in the prestigious Collectors Choice Custom Shop Les Paul range. Every aspect will be reproduced including the thin neck profile that first sold the guitar to Waddy; 'When I picked it up and my hand went around the neck, it felt like time had stopped for the moment,' he recalls. The usual limited run of around 300 will be made, and they're sure to be snapped up quickly.



Jackson's Slime Swirl
If you want to stand out from the crowd while throwing down super-fast fret-melting runs, a Jackson Pro DK2M Dinky Limited Run shred machine in a fetching limited run Slime Green Swirl could be for you. The build includes an alder body, bolt-on maple neck with wraparound heel and a 24-fret compound radius maple fingerboard with black neck and headstock binding. Hardware highlights are the direct-mount Seymour Duncan JB Zebra (bridge) and '59 Zebra (neck) humbucking pickups with five-way blade switching and a Floyd Rose bridge. See www.jacksonguitars.com for more details.



An EVH Wolfgang for less
The most affordable guitar yet from Eddie Van Halen's Fender-backed EVH brand is the Wolfgang WG Standard (£418). All Eddie's favoured specs are present and correct: The one-piece bolt-on maple neck with graphite reinforcement sports a fast 12"-16" compound-radius maple fingerboard with rolled edges and 22 jumbo frets, there are two EVH Wolfgang direct-mount humbuckers and there's a heel-mounted spoke-wheel truss rod adjuster. Bridge is the EVH-Branded Floyd Rose Special which comes with a Floyd Rose locking nut. There will be a tunomatic bridge version too, which we would expect to be cheaper yet. See www.evhgear.com.

Album reviews

Robert Plant
LULLABY AND... THE CEASELESS ROAR
East West

Psychedelic bluegrass spiked with hypnotic African blues? Plant's tenth solo album, backed by The Sensational Shape Shifters, is a heady brew of trippy tunes that resonate in transcendental fashion. Justin Adams supplies throbbing riffage,

Liam Tyson plucks banjo and weaves intricate guitar lines, while Juldeh Camara's Gambian one-string fiddle is otherworldly. An enthralling, soul nourishing jambalaya.

Martin Barre
ORDER OF PLAY
Edifying

When your fans are demanding a CD release of your live show, who's to argue? Certainly not Martin Barre, so after headlining a festival in Somerset last year the Jethro Tull guitar legend and his band set up at Middle Farm Studios to give the fans what they

wanted. With everything being done in one take, Tull classics are delivered with consummate skill as well as life-affirming piss'n'vinegar that have you punching the air.

Devon Allman
RAGGED & DIRTY
Ruf

As the Allman Brothers hang up their touring togs, frontman Gregg's progeny, Devon, is reaching an artistic zenith. There's an Allman-esque soulful blues-rock bent here but it's of a rawer kind and though Devon has inherited ability

from his uncle Duane – *Midnight Lake Michigan* is a moody masterclass – he's no slide man. Fretwork is biting and forthright while the vocals have an emotive vigour.

Lenny Kravitz
STRUT
Roxie

Blatantly populist and raunchy, Lenny's soul-infused guitar-led pop-rock can grate a little, but there's an real multi-instrumentalist talent beneath all the posturing. *Frankenstein* and *New York City* are slices of anthemic soul

power, *Dirty White Boots* is lewd and riff-fuelled, while *She's A Beast* is cool and Stonesy. Hook-laden nuggets for those who latch on to Lenny's brash aesthetic.

Johnny Marr
PLAYLAND
Warner Music Group

Given how long it took the Smiths guitar man to step out with his first solo album, Johnny Marr has wasted remarkably little time getting on with the follow-up. He's clearly warming to the idea of being a vocalist, whilst not forgetting that – at heart –

he's a true guitar player. The *Gimme Shelter*-echoes of *Candidate*, and the soaring sugar-sharp guitar on *Dynamo* are just two of the many, many delights.

Status Quo
AQUOSTIC (STRIPPED BARE)
Fourth Chord

The pun was clearly irresistible to the Quo boys and it allows them to rifle through all the hits and more in an entertainingly unplugged fashion. Strings and accordion back the jaunty Rossi/Parfitt acoustics, and the latter sits remarkably

well in the Quo cannon. It's fresh and full of charm but sticking it out for the full 24 cuts might leave some yearning for that twin Telecaster action.

Peppino D'Agostino
PENUMBRA
Mesa/Bluemoon

Possessing the kind of ability that can send even the most cynical guitar-player's jaw hurtling towards the floor, Peppino D'Agostino's latest album only enhances his reputation as an acoustic guitar virtuoso. Once you've got over the

fact that you'll never be this good you can relax and enjoy the sheer joy and emotion the Italian maestro puts into these tracks. A entrancing mix of fire and melody.

Lucky Peterson
TRAVELIN' MAN
JSP

When halfway through the album, Peterson asks whether the audience wants to 'get on down', he already knows the answer. This man, who has been rocking the crowds since kindergarten, is a master on delivering 57 varieties of blues-fuelled

crowd-pleasers, and on the likes of *I'm Free* he shows that a blues shuffle done well can truly get to the cockles of your heart. Lucky Peterson is a force of nature to savour.

Erja Lyytinen
THE SKY IS CRYING
Tuohi

The queen of Finnish slide guitar pays heartfelt homage to her hero and guiding light Elmore James. Erja first learnt to play slide by cribbing over *Dust My Broom* and as she recreates James' classic cuts on her signature HOS electro-reso it's

clear she has genuine affection for the material. Classically trained but no less fiery for it, Erja gives bottleneck blues a stylish makeover with passion and finesse.

SNAP JUDGEMENTS

Various
DEAD MAN'S TOWN
Lightning Rod

Tribute to Springsteen's *Born In The USA* that reinvents those fist pumping classics in stunning, dark brooding style. Low, Apache Relay and Joe Pug contribute

Grand Fatilla
GLOBAL SHUFFLE
Grand Fatilla

This quartet from Boston USA blend folk styles from across the globe to build an exotic, gypsy jazz-charged 'global stomp' to intoxicating effect

Brian Tarquin & Heavey Friends
GUITARS FOR WOUNDED WARRIORS
Cleopatra

Steve Morse, Chuck Loeb, Bumblefoot and more salute US forces casualties via the medium of shred

Virgil & The Accelerators
ARMY OF THREE
Mystic

The modern blues-rock merchants return with some more refined, yet still intensive, cuts for your lugholes to get around. Don't be afraid

The Call
A TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL BEEN
Lightyear/Label

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club's Robert Levon Been takes his late father's place for a stirring live tribute to The Call's frontman

Red Zone Rider
RED ZONE RIDER
Magna Carta

Champion shredder Vinnie Moore's new power trio rip it up with some slick, righteous classic rock packed with ferocious fretwork and smart, raucous tunes

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VOLUME
TONE
TONE

Rockin' All Over The World

A mere split-second ago in the big scheme of things, the humble guitar was just a lesser instrument to be ranked alongside the banjo and the mandolin – but then came the 20th century, and everything changed. **Michael Heatley** tracks the guitar's remarkable story, from parlour picker to the most popular music-making device in the world

The guitar today is part of everyday life. The cost of an acoustic six-string stands alongside the computer games console as part of the 'shopping basket' analysed at regular intervals to come up with the Retail Price Index, while the instrument so many youngsters 'threw a sickie' to practise in years past is now in the classroom and the National Curriculum.

No less a man than Keith Richards has just published a book on the way the guitar built a bridge between him and his grandfather Gus, an outcome that provoked an editorial in *The Times* (the Stones' last was in 1967 when Keith and Mick Jagger were briefly put behind bars). So it's fair to say that the guitar is everywhere we look.

Of course, it hasn't always been that way. But how long did it take, and how many rivals did it have to beat, to become the west's dominant – some would say inescapable – musical instrument? Hold on to your G-strings, it's quite a journey...

Like the pizza, the guitar was born in Europe but found its home in the United States. Its roots go back to Babylonian times; by the 15th century it was prevalent in Spain, and it is still sometimes referred to as the Spanish guitar. A fifth string was added in the early 16th century, a further string (the bottom E) arriving around the time of the American Revolution.

By the 19th century, American composers and publishers were busy producing sheet music of all kinds for the guitar and the banjo. These ranged from classical compositions to jigs, reels, songs and even transcriptions from operas for solo guitar, so the instrument was clearly accepted. Back in its native Europe, the classical guitar was enjoying its first 'Golden Age' thanks to composers like Fernando Sors and Francisco Tarrega.

The guitar's pronounced, curved 'waist' and, in most cases, a flat back and front, otherwise known as the soundboard, would remain relatively unchanged from the 16th to the early years of the 20th century. The modern classical guitar took its present form when Spanish maker Antonio Torres introduced 'fan' top bracing around 1850, increasing the size of the body and altering its proportions.

Christian Friedrich Martin, the founder of Martin guitars, opened a guitar shop in New York in 1833 after being chased out of his native Germany by the violin-makers' guild. Seeing their instrument's superiority under threat, the German violin makers went to court to have him banned from guitar manufacturing as he was a member of the rival cabinet-makers' guild. CF Martin won the original case, but after successfully defending a later one he decided that life would be more hassle-free in the land of opportunity.

On the airwaves: an Ohio family around the radio, 1925

CF Martin, pioneer of the steel-string guitar

Orville Gibson, who gave his name to the giant guitar company

L-R: a cittern or English guitar, circa 1760; a Martin from 1874; and a tenor guitar from the 1890s

CF Martin arrived Stateside to find the banjo dominating the music scene. The instrument was in full flower, would remain so for the rest of the century and was, as yet, in no mood to move over. Ironically it was no indigenous instrument itself, being just as much of an import as the guitar; African slaves brought it with them in the 17th century and, because the materials used to make a crude version of this instrument were readily available, the banjo quickly spread among the plantation workers in the South.

The end of World War I ushered in the dawn of the jazz age, and the tenor banjo – a four-string variant with metal strings, played with a plectrum – was the stringed rhythm instrument best able to make itself heard. (The guitar had replaced its traditional gut strings with steel ones in the early 20th century for similar reasons.)

The banjo was, for many years, an accepted part of a conventional jazz band, tasked with maintaining the rhythm alongside the bass, drums and piano. It was in an attempt to rebalance the sound in relation to the brass and woodwind instruments that the guitar was originally brought in and, eventually, amplified.

It was a banjo-making company, Vega, that first pioneered the idea of a pickup that could amplify a vibrating string; they were one of two companies on the scene in 1928, and their concept of 'a unit attached to the head of the banjo that transmitted the tone to a portable amplifier and radio loudspeaker' was a portent of things to come – even if the guitar, not the banjo, took fullest advantage.

Dance music was becoming smoother-sounding, and orchestra banjoists came under pressure to 'double' on the sweeter-toned guitar. Also, recording technology was now improving and the guitar became more regularly seen as a studio instrument. The arrival in the mid-'20s of tenor and plectrum guitars, essentially consisting of a banjo-style neck on a guitar body, was a half-way house.

In 1929, much-admired Atlanta banjo-player Perry Bechtel inspired Martin to create a 'proper' guitar that would suit those intending to convert. Until then, Martin had used the traditional 12-fret neck pioneered by Spanish and classical gut-strung guitars. Bechtel's banjo had 15 frets clear of the body, and he challenged Martin to equal this. The result was the 14-fret Orchestral Model (OM) series; claimed to be the first truly modern acoustic guitar, it has never since been out of production.

Ukuleles and Hawaiian guitars, launched to the US public at the Pacific Exposition of 1915 and popularised by vaudeville performers such as Roy Smeck and Cliff 'Ukulele Ike' Edwards, enjoyed sales spurts in the '20s that made them potential rivals to the guitar. But the ukulele market had slowed down significantly by the '30s, while Hawaiian guitars, played both conventionally and lap-style with a steel bar, were challenged by the resonator guitar in 1928, with its greater volume and sustain thanks to internal aluminium speaker cones. National, Supro and Dobro all promoted resonator technology in varying forms, but, as with its Hawaiian rivals, the sound was

TIMELINE
The history of the Guitar

1833 Christian Friedrich Martin, founder of Martin guitars, opens a guitar shop in New York

1902 Orville Gibson establishes his company, initially to make mandolins

1915 Pacific Exposition of 1915 launches ukuleles and Hawaiian guitars

1922 Gibson's flagship acoustic the L-5 arrives developed by Lloyd Loar

1928 Advent of the resonator guitar .

1928 Banjo-makers Vega pioneer the idea of a pickup to amplify a vibrating string

1929 Banjo-player Perry Bechtel inspires Martin's OM acoustic

1931 Rickenbacker 'Frying Pan' appears with a magnetic pickup

1935 Jazzman Eddie Durham records the first electric guitar solo

somewhat specialist and not as versatile as the regular guitar.

The mandolin was the other predominant stringed instrument of the day, Gibson and Epiphone being two successful mandolin makers that would eventually diversify to make guitars. With its eight paired strings, the mandolin shared many of the guitar's advantages, being fretted, portable and having a sound suiting just about every style of music. It was also tuned like a violin, an advantage to anyone already versed on that instrument.

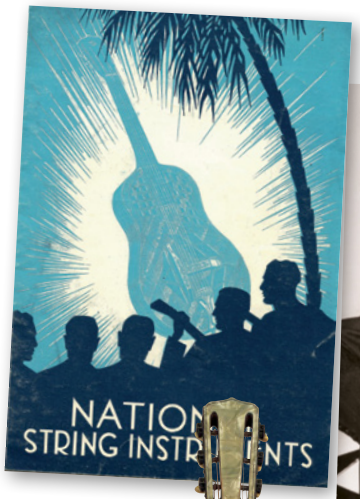
But the biggest rival the guitar had to conquer was not only ubiquitous but a veritable centre of family entertainment. The piano's name was an abbreviation of pianoforte, the 'forte' suffix denoting loudness, and the instrument was an advance on its predecessor, the harpsichord, by allowing the player to alter the loudness and tone with the force of their fingers. A sustain pedal also allowed a further degree of control.

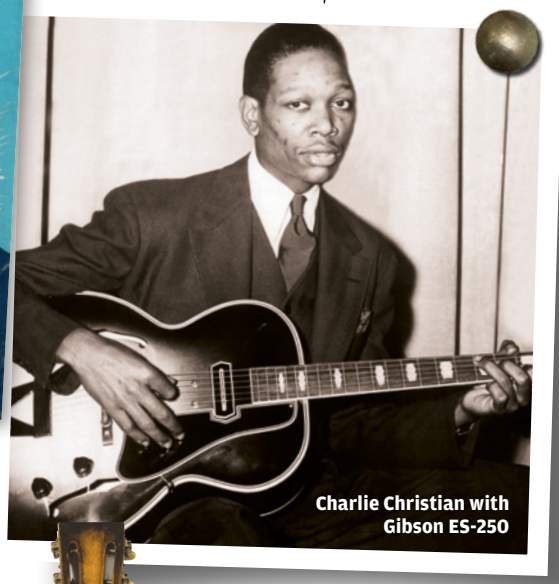
The rise of the middle class over the 19th and 20th centuries in Europe and North America had seen sales of the piano soar as more families could afford the instrument and the cost of lessons. The latter was apparently more common for girls than boys, the ability to play the piano making young women 'more appealing'!

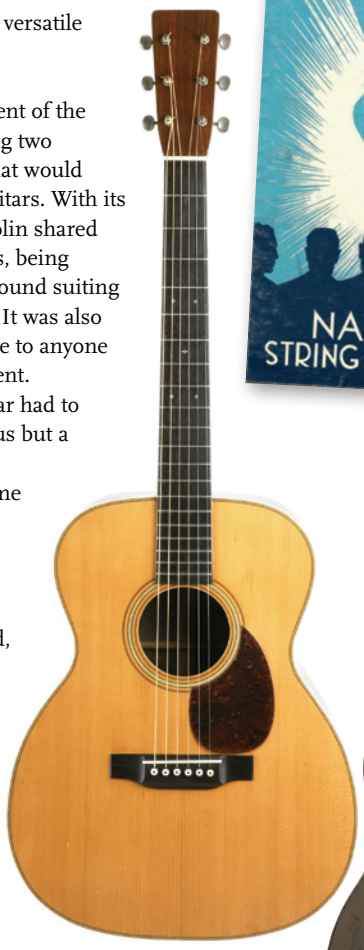
Sheet music was the way music was not only preserved historically, but how it had been presented: Beck's 2012 release *Song Reader*, a set of new compositions presented in songbook form, was a deliberate homage to that pre-gramophone age. The drawback was sheet music required someone who could 'read the dots' to interpret it.

But that was no problem as, when piano ownership peaked in 1909, most families had at least one player in their ranks. Religious music tended to be played on piano or organ, and the guitar was decried as an instrument of the Devil's Music. When not at church, families would gather round the living-room piano to entertain themselves in the innocent, pre-television era. However, 'making your own entertainment' was to pall somewhat when first the gramophone and then radio allowed the easier option of passive enjoyment. Public houses and bars, hotels and schools were also the piano's domain, but the US Great Depression of the 1930s saw sales drop sharply, and many piano manufacturers went out of business.

The accordion, invented in 1829 but remaining nearly a century in the ethnic-music backwaters, combined keyboard capability with portability. Its heyday between 1910 and the end of the ↔

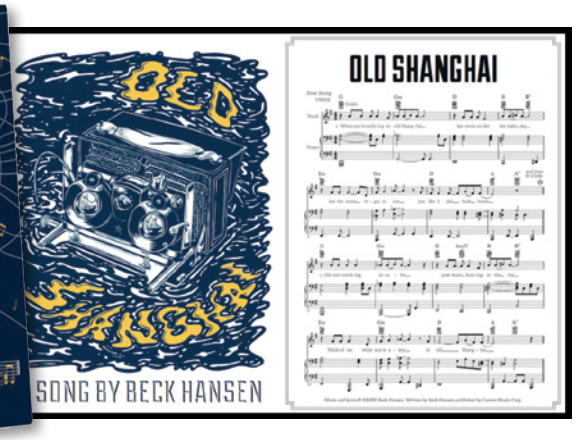



Charlie Christian with Gibson ES-250



A 1931 Martin OM-28, a 1931 National Style 4 Tricone, and the 'Frying Pan'

Early National lap steels and amplifiers



1936 Gibson ES-150 is the first commercially significant electric Spanish guitar

1945 Leo Fender, with business partner Doc Kauffman, markets his first amplifier

1950 The Fender Esquire, very quickly renamed the Broadcaster, introduced

1952 Gibson Les Paul launched

1954 The first Fender Stratocaster is sold

1954 Elvis Presley's first single *That's Alright Mama* ushers in guitar-based rock'n'roll

1958 Acoustic sales boosted by the Kingston Trio's *Tom Dooley*

1959 Hank Marvin brings the first Stratocaster to the UK

1964 Beatles appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, inspiring a generation of guitarists

1982 Fender production begins for the first time outside the US in Japan

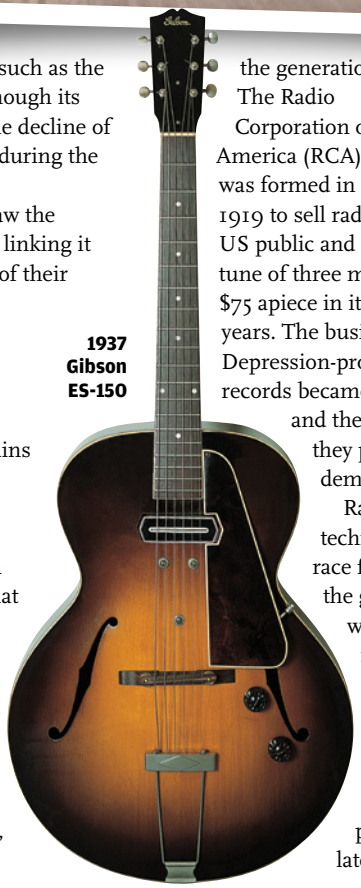
2004 Guitar added to Retail and Consumer Price Index basket of goods

Bennie Moten Orchestra, 1931: spot Eddie Durham on banjo, ready to double on a National tenor guitar

1950s came thanks to bands such as the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, though its ubiquity took a knock with the decline of the vaudeville theatre circuit during the Great Depression.

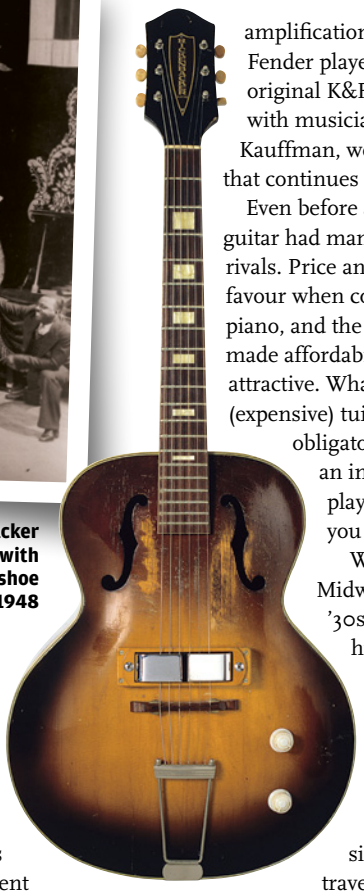
The advent of rock'n'roll saw the accordion spurned by youths linking it with the light-hearted music of their parents and grandparents. Nils Lofgren is the only rock guitarist to come to mind who cut his musical teeth as an accordionist. It returned to the ethnic realm, but remains a mainstream instrument in Brazil and Mexico.

Radio broadcasting, which began in the United States in 1920, was a game-changer that gave the guitar greater impetus. With the advent of radio and the phonograph record, the option was there to copy what you heard, not rely upon sheet music – and the guitar was tailor-made for this approach, one used in folk music down the generations. The Radio Corporation of America (RCA) was formed in 1919 to sell radio sets to the US public and did so to the tune of three million units at $75 apiece in its first three years. The business proved Depression-proof since, while records became a luxury, radios and the free entertainment they provided were still in demand.



1937 Gibson ES-150

Radio and its associated technology would also boost the race for more volume – a contest the guitar would end up winning. Pickups had been introduced on Rickenbacker's 'Frying Pan' in 1931, which boasted a horseshoe magnet, and a blade-style unit was present on Gibson's ES-150 production guitar five years later. But when it came to amplification, radio repairman Leo Fender played a major role. The original K&F amps, made in 1945 with musician Clayton 'Doc' Kauffman, were the first of a line that continues today.



Rickenbacker archtop with horseshoe pickup, 1948

Even before amplification, the guitar had many advantages over its rivals. Price and portability were in its favour when compared with the piano, and the Great Depression made affordability even more attractive. What was more, formal (expensive) tuition was far from obligatory; buy (or even make) an instrument, find a fellow player, copy his fingers and you had a ticket to ride.

Woody Guthrie was a Midwesterner who, in the '30s, packed his bags, put his acoustic guitar under his arm and headed for pastures new. He headed for the promised land of California, jumping freight trains and singing for fellow travellers. The dustbowl balladeer was born, creating a template Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan and others would profitably pursue in future years. Guitars were also, of course, ideal for busking, a case the ideal repository for the coins of an appreciative audience.

A parallel migration to Guthrie's was taking place on the other side of the racial divide. A shift in population during World War I, thanks to the creation of jobs for unskilled workers in the North, had already irrevocably changed the balance between southern and northern states. People were on the move – and blues music, created on the Mississippi delta, was on the move too.

It's surely no coincidence that the blues' two most popular instruments are both highly portable, but the pocket-size harmonica failed to threaten its partner in popularity. One obvious drawback was the need to alternate singing and playing, while having to purchase harmonicas in different keys was also a deterrent. Muddy Waters was one legendary name who graduated from the harp to the guitar and never looked back.

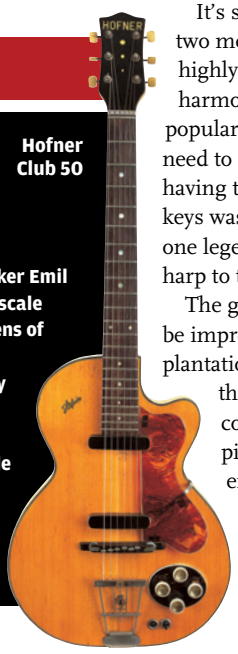
The guitar had another advantage: it could be improvised, as Buddy Guy, raised on a plantation northwest of New Orleans, did in the early '40s. His first instrument consisted of two strings attached to a piece of wood with hairpins, and was enough to help him discover the skills that would bring him fame.

Country bluesmen used Memphis, Tennessee as a staging post, and the city became a ➔

MEANWHILE, BACK IN BRITAIN...

In early 20th century Britain, the piano held pride of place in the living room while the banjo and ukulele (think George Formby) were staples of the music-hall and variety stage as the decades passed. The skiffle boom of the '50s was the first sign the tide was turning – but when beat struck, a trade embargo discouraging US imports meant it would be 1961 before Fenders were seen in any number.

The relative cost of 'name' guitars half a century ago was also huge; a new Strat retailed at £124 – between eight and nine weeks' average wages. With demand high – retailers Ivor Mairants reported a 500 per cent increase between 1955 and 1956, the year of Elvis's breakthrough – it was left to Europe to fulfil it. Hence session guitarist Joe Brown's late- '50s workhorse was a German-made Hofner Club 50, while Paul McCartney, the world's most famous Hofner user, had learned to play on an eastern European-made Rex. London-based banjo-maker Emil Grimshaw made Joe Brown a short-scale guitar. 'It was white and it had dozens of bloody knobs on it,' grins Brown. 'I remember Johnny Cash took a fancy to it... I said he could use it on a TV show.' Other Grimshaw users included Tony Sheridan, Marty Wilde and latterly Pete Townshend, who from late 1965 to early 1966 used a late-'50s semi-acoustic with three toaster-style pickups.



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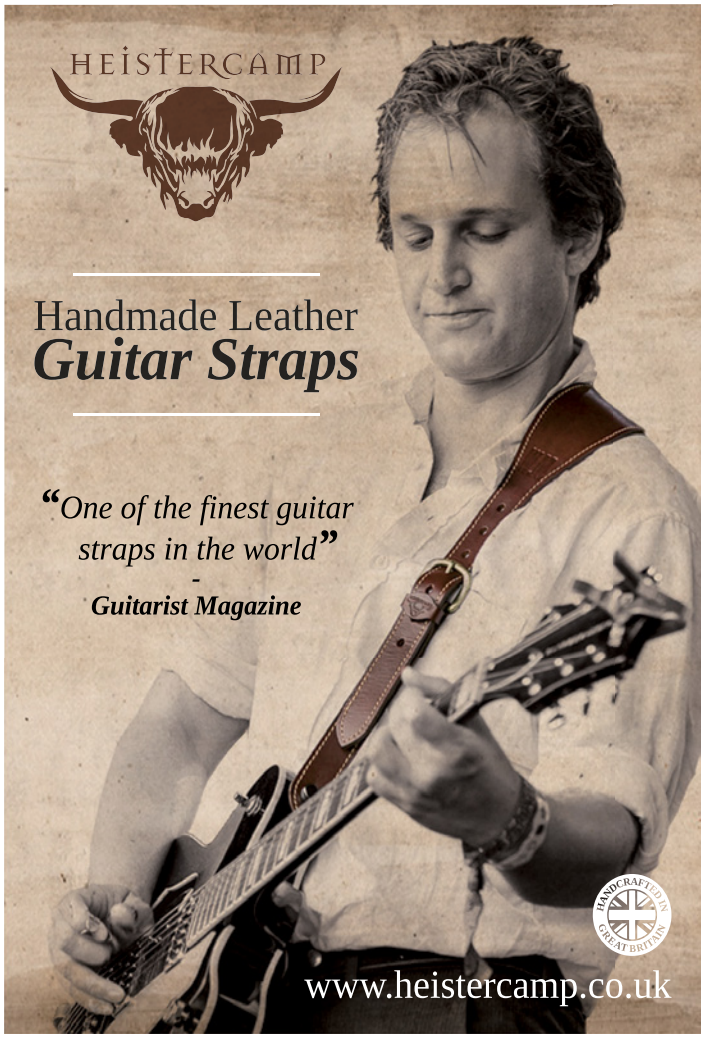

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HANDCRAFTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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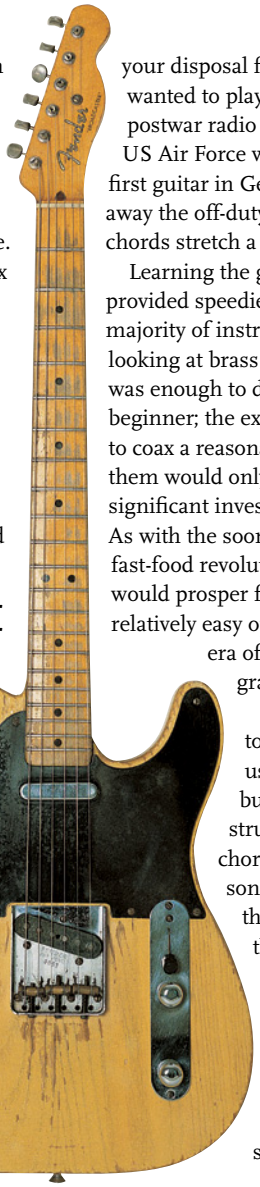
musical melting pot where Elvis would, in the mid-'50s, combine white country music and black blues to genre-defying/defining effect. Without the guitar, that would never have happened.

World War II had seen yet more Black Americans migrate to where the jobs were. When hostilities finished, a massive influx of labour was needed to sustain the hectic pace war had established; key industrial centres like Chicago and Detroit, with their steel mills and car factories, became centres of entertainment when the workforce clocked off.

It was apparent that the guitar would need help to be heard over the din in its new urban environment. When he arrived in the bars of Detroit's Hastings Street, John Lee Hooker changed style from a country/rural folk-blues to a more urban way of playing based on tuning his guitar to an open chord and amplifying the result. Soon the guitar was the sound of the city.

The war years had seen the guitar make it to many theatres – and, when repatriated, many servicemen opted to continue their love affair with the instrument. You didn't have to sight-read in your barracks or bunkhouse, or even have a chord chart as long as you made the chords at your disposal fit the songs you wanted to play. Johnny Cash, a postwar radio operator in the US Air Force who bought his first guitar in Germany to while away the off-duty hours, made his chords stretch a long way.



1950 Fender Broadcaster

Learning the guitar certainly provided speedier results than the majority of instruments. Just looking at brass or woodwind was enough to deter the beginner; the expertise required to coax a reasonable tune from them would only result from a significant investment of time. As with the soon-to-come fast-food revolution, the guitar would prosper from being a relatively easy option in a new era of near-instant gratification.

The guitar was versatile, too, and could not only be used to pick out melodies, but in its simplest form to strum the three or four chords to which most popular songs could be reduced. It thus scored over rivals like the violin, saxophone and flute, which were used in the main to play single-note melodies.

While accompanying a singer the guitar player could transpose songs to suit their vocal range, while transposition in semitones on piano often involved black keys and complications far beyond the beginner. (The use of a capo to shorten string length, a 17th-century innovation, was an easy way to do this.) The guitar could be played in company with others or on its own, while combinations of two or more could provide rhythm strumming and more elaborate picked melody parts.

Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs in the 1950s

Jazz had now integrated the amplified guitar into its band format, Eddie Durham being the first guitarist to record an electric solo in 1935 on Lester Young's Kansas City Five sessions. Charlie Christian's brief spell as a member of Benny Goodman's band from 1939 to 1941 was also influential, adding horn-like single-note runs to the instrument's established chord-based approach. The resonator banjo, with a separate plate on the back of the pot, designed to project the sound forward, simply could not compete.

The advent of the solidbody guitar, one that could not be played without an amplifier, cemented the change. The reason for Leo Fender majoring on these was because he realised hollow-bodied guitars, such as Gibson's ES (Electric Spanish) series would always be prone to feedback problems. Blues guitarist like Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy were early adopters.

The success of the electric guitar diminished all competition – not least its unamplified sister. But the humble acoustic still had one eye on glory, and the folk boom of the '50s was its finest commercial hour. Guitar and banjo had joined faces in the ranks of Flatt and Scruggs and the Weavers, predominant acts in bluegrass and folk as the decade began. Lester Flatt and Fred Hellerman between them made sales of acoustics go through the roof – both played Martins – but the Kingston Trio, formed in San Francisco, broadened the appeal of folk music and guitars in exponential fashion.

SINGING COWBOYS

Hollywood had played a part in giving the guitar a huge boost in its depiction of the Singing Cowboy. This combined two popular screen 'flavours', the western and the musical. Actor/singers such as Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, seen and heard in Westerns during the genre's heyday of the '30s and '40s, were arguably the original guitar heroes.

Gene Autry released more than 300 records, but is best remembered for starring in 93 movies. Roy Rogers, who was lead singer with the Sons Of The Pioneers, starred in 87 westerns for Republic Pictures and was the number one Western box office attraction for 12 consecutive years.

When Roy superseded Gene on the big screen, Autry simply transferred to television. He appeared in 91 episodes of his self-titled show from 1950 to 1955 and Rogers followed suit, moving to TV in 1951 for a six-year stint with his guitar and his faithful steed, Trigger.

When Sears, Roebuck & Co. introduced the Gene Autry Round-up guitar in the autumn of 1932, the high-quality acoustic made with a solid spruce top and solid mahogany back and sides sold for $9.75. It remained in production until 1955. Many years later Rogers lent his name to a less credible instrument made of fibreboard (a strong cardboard) also offered by the Sears mail-order company. Sometimes considered toys, they were marketed from 1956 to 1974 and are now collectors' items.

Gene Autry with his 1933 Martin D-45

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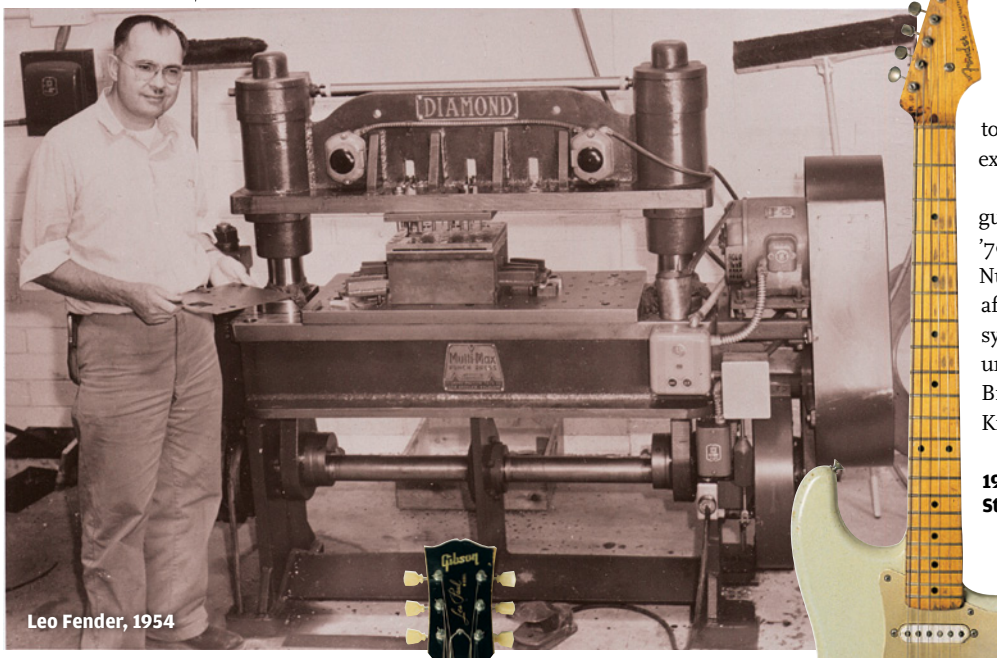
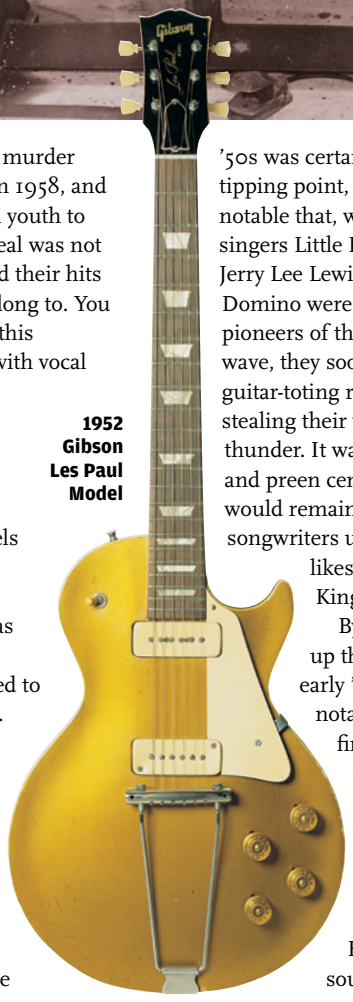


Leo Fender, 1954

Their version of traditional murder ballad *Tom Dooley* shot to #1 in 1958, and encouraged Middle American youth to pick up six-strings. Their appeal was not based on virtuoso picking, and their hits could happily be strummed along to. You can trace the development of this guitar-based music, overlaid with vocal harmonies, through to the Byrds in the '60s and, in the following decade, the Eagles.

The music business had survived the '30s economic slump because the major labels bought many of the small companies collapsing around them. The result, however, was bland music, purveyed by unthreatening stars who aimed to appeal to the widest audience.

The guitar was ideally placed to help puncture this complacent bubble as new independent labels like Chess and Sun and Atlantic supercharged blues and country music for a new audience. The birth of rock'n'roll as we know it in the '50s was certainly a major tipping point, though it's notable that, while pianist/singers Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Fats Domino were all pioneers of the first wave, they soon found guitar-toting rivals stealing their visual thunder. It was far easier to pose and preen centre-stage, and the keyboard would remain the province of pop songwriters until the early '70s saw the likes of singer-songwriters Carole King, Elton John and Billy Joel.


1952 Gibson Les Paul Model

By the time the Beatles picked up their Rickenbackers in the early '60s, the guitar – and most notably the electric guitar – firmly ruled the rock'n'roll roost, and when the first notes of *I Feel Fine* brought feedback into the studio recording arena it was clear that nothing was going to halt the march of progress. Effects pedals and other sound modification techniques, as pioneered by Jimi Hendrix and others, further established the electric guitar as the benchmark it remains today, giving the instrument an ever more expressive 'voice'.

1954 Fender Stratocaster

Not that it's all been plain sailing for the guitar. Six-stringers looked on in the late '70s and '80s as the Human League, Gary Numan and their ilk took advantage of affordable keyboards. Having survived synth-pop, the guitar enjoyed an unexpected heyday in the mid-'90s as Britpop enthusiastically channelled the Kinks, Small Faces and the Fab Four for the benefit of a new generation. The electric guitars toted by Blur, Oasis and their pals were remarkably similar to the time-honoured designs of their predecessors. But the real area of development had been in acoustic luthiery, hundreds of bespoke guitar-makers offering handmade designs at often eyewatering prices and confirming the instrument's graduation to middle-class status.

And so to today. One in seven UK households has an acoustic guitar, while the humble acoustic has, as previously mentioned, represented the wider musical instrument market in the Retail and Consumer Price Index basket of goods since 2004. The guitar remains one of the simplest instruments with which to make an acceptable musical noise – but its status as the cheapest and most accessible instrument with which to do so is currently in question. It faces competition from digital rivals such as GarageBand, the sampler and even the smartphone – all user-friendly ways to make music compared to which mastering the guitar could conceivably seem a chore.

However the chips fall, the guitar remains an instrument for all occasions. You can dress it down or up, play standards that have been around for centuries, or music that actively encourages revolution and social change. It is as acceptable in Irish folk as it is in country, blues or reggae.

The guitar also has a way of getting people involved in a way other instruments cannot. You can play it in a group or alone, make your own, or buy a Fender and Gibson to look (if not yet sound) like your favourite guitar hero. If not a Fender and Gibson, then a wide variety of similar instruments to suit all budgets can be found in shops, the internet or the advertising pages of this very magazine.

The guitar has never been more accessible. Yet the one unspoken reason the guitar took over the world has to be its cool factor... and that is truly international.

ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

It was inevitable that the guitar's route to world domination should first involve conquering America. Helping shape the music that country gave birth to – jazz, blues, country, and then rock – was enough to do the rest.

With the 'me too' mimicry of popular culture, the Western world's love affair with the guitar has been imitated across the globe. There will always be bands in hotels entertaining tourists, but, while the guitar remains pre-eminent in the traditional music of Spain, Cuba, Mexico and the Hispanic countries, there is less evidence that it has found a similar role in countries like India, China and Japan. This is perhaps ironic given the fact that the Far East now produces a huge proportion of (Western-designed) guitars.

Things have come a long way from back in the '60s when the Ventures, superstars in Japan, would sell their equipment to local musicians after touring there to avoid baggage charges. Almost inevitably, Mosrite, their guitar brand of choice, shifted production to Japan in 1992.

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Photo: Russ Harrington

I Predict A RIOT

Brian Setzer is back with *Rockabilly Riot: All Original*, possibly his most rocking rockabilly record since the days of the Stray Cats. He tells **Matt Lamy** all about it

'Rockabilly, well, it's a lifestyle, it all kind of folds together," Brian Setzer chuckles. 'I'm a performer so I really like to look good and to have a cool stage outfit and things like that. I've got a couple of hot rods and I love my old '52 Triumph, but I don't have a massive collection of vehicles. Some people like to go for it more than I do, but I'm up there. I like to keep a sense of humour about my music and about myself, I think – I don't take myself too seriously.'

For the affable Setzer, that may be true, but his career proves you can retain your humour without compromising on the quality of your craft – and today we're definitely talking music. Brian has just released a freshly-written album, *Rockabilly Riot: All Original*. It's his first studio album since 2011's *Setzer Goes Instru-Mental!*, and the first non-instrumental solo studio album outside the Brian Setzer Orchestra since *13* in 2006.

'Really, I just sit down to write songs,' he says. 'Those are a little gift from someplace... I don't take them for granted, but when they start they kind of reveal themselves as to what kind of record it should be. Usually after three or four songs, it tells me that this should be this kind of record. It just happens that way.

'Whether I'm working with a small band, as on this record, or with a big band as with the Brian Setzer Orchestra, I don't really approach writing songs differently. It's very similar, really. The only difference in the way I would arrange things or play guitar is that with the big band there would be a fully developed chord going by in the music, so I have to play specifically along with that. Whereas, with a trio I can play whatever I want because it's just the bass player playing the root note, so I have a little more freedom.'

Setzer makes it all sound so simple, but he's one of the most musically literate guitar players, using a rich range of chords, scales, inversions and extensions to enhance his work. He also has a varied selection of musical influences, from the vibrant jazz scene he witnessed growing up in New York to his father's less-familiar rockabilly and country records.

'I don't really follow any rules, as such. I don't know if there are any,' he considers. 'It's just about what I've developed over the years. It's just where my ears go, there's no hard and fast rule. I don't consciously know when I'm dropping other influences into my tunes, but I do like to quote some of the old guitar solos. For example, the first guitar solo that I play on *Let's Shake* – the opening track of ➔

'I don't really follow any rules, as such. I don't know if there are any'

Gear

Guitars

1959 Gretsch 6120 with TV Jones Classic pickups, Gretsch 6120-based signature models with TV Jones-designed pickups, assorted vintage Gretsches, 1964 Gibson reverse Firebird, 1959 Guild Bluesbird, 2003 Bigsby Custom, 1958 Martin D-28

Amps

Various 1963 Fender Bassman combos, 1961 Fender Twin-Amp

Effects

Not much, but sometimes an early-'60s Fender reverb or a vintage Roland Space Echo

Photo: Russ Harrington

the new album – that one quotes Eddie Cochran. It's that simple kind of rocking, driving solo that's been copied for 60 years. I do things like that, and that's the only time I consciously think "Oh, that would be fun – let's drop an old solo in and see if people pick it up".'

The recording process for the new disc was straightforward, with Brian, bass player Mark Winchester, drummer Noah Levy and piano player Kevin McKendree all heading into the studio to record together as live. 'Peter Collins [producer] insists on it. I don't always do it,' Brian says, 'but with this kind of band a big key part was that we all lived with the music for a good month. Then we all went in and had it all memorised and really felt like a band, rather than doing it track by track, which is the way we usually do it.

'For my guitar sound I just plugged in my old '59 6120 Gretsch through a '63 Fender Bassman amp and there wasn't really any need to change it. In the past I've done a lot of changes – there might have been some new models mixed with the old ones – but on this record I just plugged it in and tore it up.

'On one track I used an old Magnatone amp, the old Buddy Holly amp – I've got one of those for the vibrato. Rather than use pedals I just use the amp. But the rest of the album was just the Fender Bassman. I don't use pedals, I just use the Roland Space Echo.'

Does this '59-6120-and-'63-Bassman represent the 'ultimate' rockabilly set-up? 'I guess you could say there are different rockabilly set-ups – everyone has their own,' Brian says. 'But for me my '59 Gretsch and Bassman amp bridges the gap between rockabilly and rock. It's just a nice rocking, stinging sound.'

Any young players just starting to be interested in rockabilly now might despair at the idea of owning such gear, but Setzer says there are always other options. 'Remember, back in the '50s a lot of the guys just had cheap equipment,' he says. 'They just came from the rural South with what they had. I don't think that makes much of a difference – I think you can still probably get a great sound. My first guitar was a Harmony; those guitars were cheap but I still like those darn things. I think if you were inventive and creative you could come up with something like that and put a set-up together.'

Asked if he's ever tried the delights of modelling amps or more 21st century technology, Setzer is ➔

Brian's British connections

Modern rockabilly may celebrate the ingredients of life from American society's '50s and '60s golden age – the cars, the fashion, not to mention the music – but when it comes to Brian Setzer, it was Britain that gave him the springboard to success. And the UK is still influencing him.

Setzer and his fellow Stray Cats, bassist Lee Rocker and drummer Slim Jim Phantom, joined forces in 1979 in their native New York, but it wasn't until they bought one-way tickets to London and joined the Teddy Boy revival in Britain that success really came their way. After just one London gig they met producer Dave Edmunds, who helped them record their self-titled debut album. That was released in Britain in 1981, and it spawned three UK hits: *Runaway Boys*, *Rock This Town*, and *Stray Cat Strut*. Another album, *Gonna Ball*, was released in the UK later in 1981. It was enough to attract the attention of EMI America... and the rest is history.

'Yeah, of course I still have fond memories of those early days in the UK with the Stray Cats,' Setzer says. 'I still have friendships I made back then. It was a rollercoaster ride. For someone 20 years old, it was just an action-packed thrill ride, it was amazing.'

The British connection has reappeared in Setzer's latest album, which was recorded with London-born super-producer Peter Collins.

'It's funny how English people seem to have a greater sensibility about what rockabilly music is, even though it was invented in the American South,' Setzer muses. 'They seem to know what it should really sound like. Peter is an experienced and accomplished producer – he's done a lot of records – but he loves rockabilly music, and he definitely knows what it should sound like.'

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STRAY CATS
Built For Speed
(1982)
The first Stray Cats record released by EMI America incorporated the best songs from their first two UK-only albums, including the classic *Rock This Town* and *Stray Cat Strut*

BRIAN SETZER
Rockabilly Riot: All Original
(2014)
Setzer says his new album reminds him of the first Stray Cats record – pure rockabilly excitement with songs about V8 engines and vinyl records. Opener *Let's Shake* is a real dancefloor-filler

And another thing...

Brian has been married three times – Julie Reiten, his wife since 2005, is currently one of the backing singers in the Brian Setzer Orchestra. Meanwhile, Brian's erstwhile Stray Cats drummer, Slim Jim Phantom, was married to Britt Ekland between 1984 and 1992.

diplomatic: 'There's good in everything. For me, it's just about having that tube rattle in the amp. Having that big old box of a guitar rattle as well.'

And few guitars are a 'bigger box' than the Gretsch hollowbodies his name has become synonymous with. 'That relationship just came to be, really. The Gretsch was the first thing that I could afford. My guitar was 100 bucks and it was just available at the time. Then, when I made some money I went out and bought other guitars and amps, but I ended up thinking, "Nah, I got it right in the first place."'

Brian's website has a section devoted entirely to his guitar collection, and there are some stunners. It's not all Gretsches, either – lurking alongside you'll find such rarities as a 1959 Guild Bluesbird, a relatively young custom Bigsby guitar from 2003, and a fine 1964 Gibson Firebird

'Boy, including new ones, I probably have about 60-70 guitars. It's time for a garage sale,' Brian laughs. 'I still have that Firebird. The reason I've got it is because I had a red Firebird when I was a kid, and it got stolen. My mum would never comment about my guitars, she doesn't know anything about them, but she did say: "Oh, what happened to that lovely red one?" So I decided to find one again. They're so rare now. I probably bought it 20 years ago to replace the old one, so that is a beauty.'

Whatever unusual guitars Setzer has back home, it's hard to ignore his Gretsch signature models, some of the most aesthetically beautiful signature guitars available. There are currently five different versions made: two based on his original 1959 6120, two Hot Rod versions based on stripped-down 6120s, while the Brian Setzer Black Phoenix is based on a 6136 Falcon.

'Boy, I do have a lot of signature models,' Brian laughs. 'And we have plans for more. We have a new Hot Rod line coming out with a whole lot of tweaks. We've changed some things. Some things I thought would be good to change, other things that Tom Jones – TV Jones – has come up with. So there'll be new pickups, and there are some different colours too. But aside from the colours, there are some real hard changes to the actual guitar.'

Those TV Jones pickups are a big ingredient of Setzer's sound, and it's a partnership that's become even closer earlier this year with the announcement of a Brian Setzer signature pickup. Derived from Brian's longtime preference for the TV Jones TV Classic, this new model is a unique design created to provide more clarity and punch.

'Tom's taken the original Filter'Tron pickup from the 1950s and he's actually made them better. He's got the sound exactly the same but he's fixed up things like the spacing between the strings, he's straightened out a lot of things on them, and now he's got three or four different models of pickups. He's got some that are powerful for people who want a little more grit to their sound, he's got some that are really clean for people who play cleaner than I do. He's taken that tone and ran in different directions with it.'

'Playing is still a thrill, but it gets harder to get to places. It's the travel I get paid for'

So with a new album out, it's a good chance for fans to see Setzer in action on the road again. 'We're doing the Christmas shows with the Brian Setzer Orchestra and then next year I'm going to put together the quartet that's on the record and we'll take that out on the road,' Brian says. 'I hope we'll be coming over the UK. We always have a nice tour presented to us, so I'm sure something will happen.

'Playing live is still a real thrill. I'd be dishonest if I didn't say it gets harder to get to places. I think Joe Walsh said: "People pay me to get to the gig, not for the gig itself." It's the travel I get paid for. But it is a good time for rockabilly, I'm sensing that, yeah.'

Banjo time

It's not always about six strings and Bigsbys for Setzer. One of the most fun YouTube videos you can find of the great man shows him playing *Foggy Mountain Breakdown* with the Stray Cats on a banjo.

'I play the banjo all the time,' Brian says. 'That's the number one thing people say when they come over to party – "Brian, play the banjo for us!" It's fantastic. I don't pretend to be any kind of expert on one, but what I do seems to be a real crowd pleaser!'

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StarMan

The king of the colossal and monolithic guitar riff is back on his ownsome with a clutch of acoustics and archtops. Oh, and the odd fuzz pedal as well. Interview by **Michael Heatley**

J (for Joseph) Mascis is, it would be fair to say, a man of few words and many projects. Not only does he remain singer, songwriter and guitarist of Dinosaur Jr, the grunge trio that put him firmly on the musical map in the late '80s and '90s, he also participates in Witch, Heavy Blanket and Sweet Apple, to name but three side bands. He also plays drums, his first musical love, as well as guitar, and regularly guests with others on both instruments. Dinosaur Jr, his venture with Murph (drums) and Lou Barlow (bass), reformed after an eight-year break in 2005; they played in Britain in August, and a new album is possible 'if I can get some more songs together'. For the record, Witch is 'like stoner rock, close to Sabbath', Heavy Blanket is 'full-on guitar wankery, instrumental stuff for those who like endless guitar solos' and Sweet Apple 'is kind of a joke band, I guess; we don't really do anything.'

But it's Mascis' new solo album *Tied To A Star*, his second in three years after 2011's *Several Shades Of Why*, we've hooked up to discuss. He follows in the footsteps of Neil Young and Richard Thompson in being able to forge parallel careers as an acoustic and electric artist, and *Tied To A Star* sees him mix and match a selection of Martins with his acoustic workhorse, a Gibson CF-100E, and 'some weird Epiphone that was an arch top and someone converted to a flat top.' When he plays this material live later this year, the Gibson will bear the brunt of the action.

Another acoustic album exists in his catalogue, but mention of 1996's *Martin And Me* isn't especially welcome. Any connection with his current project is purely, it seems, the unplugged format. 'It was a kind of document of some acoustic shows; no one could picture me playing acoustic, I guess. It was a recording of a show to see what I was up to – we brought it out much like a bootleg.'

One magazine compared his playing on *Martin And Me* to that of 'a man with webbed hands', while *Rolling Stone* gave it a rare one-star review. That's unlikely to be the fate of *Tied To A Star* – 10 tracks 'all written pretty recently, as far as I can remember' and ranging from the self-deprecating starter *Me Again* through the Neil Young-esque *And Then* to *Trailing Off*, a song that does anything but. Some fans have said the single *Every Morning* sounds more like Dinosaur Jr than a solo effort, and the crossover is also apparent with final track *Better Plane*, which leaves us with a trademark solo that Mascis reveals was his CF-100E. No Jazzmasters were employed; it was 'all acoustic, with a bit of fuzz here and there...'

Gear

Guitars
Jazzmasters, Martins, Gibson CF-100E

Amps
Marshall plexi, Hiwatt heads and a Fender blackface Twin

Effects
How long have you got? Custom ZVex and custom Dr Scientist pedals, Big Muff, RMC wah, Electric Mistress, Megavibe Univibe copy, Eventide TimeFactor delay, Boss RV-5 reverb...

Dinosaur Jr in 2012: Mascis, Barlow, Murph

While most artists agonise for weeks about naming their new 'baby', J is pragmatic in the extreme. 'It's part of the lyrics to a song, there's not much to it,' he remarks of *Tied To A Star*, adding quickly 'but it's a star as in the sky, rather than Hollywood.'

As might be expected, he adopts a different approach to a solo record than a Dinosaur release. 'I'm writing it on acoustic, and riffs or something I come up with don't sound like they fit the mood of the record – and I have a mood for it in mind – I just save them for later and wait until I come up with something that would fit in.'

The new album uses drums sparingly, his first instrument having been notably absent on the previous acoustic effort. 'I always want to put drums on everything – I try not to, and sometimes I lose the battle.'

Mascis, who has become a father in middle age, has always been a hometown boy. Born and raised in Amherst, Massachusetts, he still lives there and even records his music in a studio in his house he calls Bisquiteen. The two months he'll be away from home promoting *Tied To A Star* in the States this autumn could be a bit of a trial. 'Yeah, I don't know if it's the greatest idea. We'll see how it goes.'

He admits touring solo is more daunting than with a band. 'The travelling is easier; the playing is a bit harder. You're on your own and trying to entertain everyone by yourself, with not as many amps and stuff.' His reward, though, is that a he's attracting new fans. 'Yeah, I do notice that – and that's what I hope for. My generation don't get out much, you know, so it's good that younger people come.' And if the youngsters raised on their parents' screeching Dinosaur Jr records are bemused by seeing him peering through his trademark specs over elaborate grey whiskers and an acoustic Gibson, he still has the passion within. 'I've certainly mellowed out a bit,' he admits with a twinkle, 'but there's still some anger in there somewhere!'

> *'Travelling solo is easier; the playing is a bit harder, with not as many amps and stuff'*

He admits the new album is 'an extension, a kind of a continuation' of *Several Shades of Why?*, but seasons the mix with guests including Ken Maiuri (Young@ Heart Chorus), Pall Jenkins (Black Heart Procession), Mark Mulcahy (Miracle Legion) and Chan Marshall (Cat Power), and it's clearly important for Mascis that the new release be available on vinyl. 'Yes, that's the best,' he confirms. 'It doesn't really exist unless it comes out on vinyl. Even now, a lot of people don't have it, but for as long as it exists I feel a lot better about it.' Does J still have a record collection? 'Yes, except for ones people stole from me.'.And should his house ever burn down? 'I'd probably try to grab some hardcore seven-inchers: Negative Approach, Minor Threat...'

Mascis also composed the music for the 2013 film *Sunlight Jr*, starring Matt Dillon and Naomi Watts. 'I really enjoyed it,' he says. 'It's good to write for a specific purpose. You don't just have to pull songs out of the air; you can watch a movie and sometimes the music writes itself. I dunno if I'd do it again. There are a lot of headaches, and I'd rather have a big fan [in charge] who gives me some kind of leeway. There's so many people involved making movies it can get really annoying – everyone has an opinion.'

A MAN AND HIS GURU

Mascis recently attended the 60th birthday celebrations of his guru Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Amma to her disciples). They first met in 1995, and since then her teachings have influenced his life and (on albums like 2000's *More Light*) his songwriting. 'Amma has given me a lot to write about,' he has said. 'What better inspiration for songs is there than your guru? I am constantly crying out for help along the bumpy road of life.'

J, who had packed his signature Squier Jazzmaster, was 'amazed I got a Marshall half-stack in India because the other times I've been there there's been hardly any gear from America or elsewhere. I was blasting it 10 feet away from Amma.

'I had a band – a guy from Finland who's in Von Hertzen Brothers [Mikko von Hertzen]; he plays bass, and he's into Amma as well. I had a drummer, Herb [Graham], from LA. We played a few Dino songs, some Heavy Blanket songs, a few songs I wrote for Amma.

'I know they filmed everything,' he concludes, so we may see this performance on YouTube or elsewhere. It's not his first musical venture in the East; in 2003 he went to India and performed at Amma's 50th birthday in Kochi. Two years later, he released *J & Friends Sing And Chant* to support relief work following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

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Murph, Mascis & Barlow in the early days

Listen up

DINOSAUR JR
You're Living All Over Me
(1987)
Dinosaur Jr's second LP from 1987 was 'the album when everything came together', according to Mascis

J MASCIS & THE FOG
More Light
(2000)
J's 2000 post-Dino release launched new band the Fog and involved legendary ex-Minutemen bassist Mike Watt

J MASCIS
Tied To A Star
(2014)
Latest and possibly greatest acoustic effort mixes fuzz and acoustic sounds effectively on tracks like *Come Down*

And another thing...

J Mascis recently appeared in a Brooklyn bar with the surviving members of Nirvana following their Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction

The focus may have shifted to Mascis' solo activities with the release of *Tied To A Star*, but the shadow of Dinosaur Jr still looms large. A limited edition vinyl box set of singles for this year's Record Store Day has joined a book in celebrating their turbulent existence. 'It's a coffee-table book, a picture book,' J explains. 'It brought back memories for sure; I had to figure out where [the pictures] were from what was going on at the time... I have a vague memory of some stuff!' And what of the long-rumoured film or TV documentary? 'It didn't go anywhere. There was a lot of footage, but that's about it.'

Nirvana toured as support to Dinosaur Jr in 1991, just pre-*Nevermind*, but Mascis' crew had to wait until 2005 and the reissue of their first three albums for their place in music history to be widely recognised. Was it public/press reaction to their reappearance that made you feel you had unfinished business? 'No, we knew we had unfinished business beforehand.'

In 1988, J came up with a profound quote, even by his economical standards. 'It's my ambition not to have ambition. Though I guess I'd rather be rich than poor.' Making a living from music a quarter of a century later is 'probably more difficult. I'm playing a lot more than I used to.' But he must be doing something right. Having been ranked #86 in *Rolling Stone*'s list of the 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time, *SPIN* magazine elevated him to the dizzy heights of #5 in a similar poll two years ago.

J was recently pictured with Aerosmith's Tyler and Perry and Scorpion Rudolf Schenker watching mutual heroes the Rolling Stones. 'It was only the third time I'd seen them,' he enthused, 'and I thought they were good. They didn't play three hours, they cut down to two, which was a bit more manageable.' Would he dep for them if ever he were asked? 'Oh, sure – I'd give it a shot, I'd do my best. J is still a junior dinosaur compared with his Glimmer Twin heroes, but on the evidence of *Tied To A Star* he's not yet an endangered species.

FENDER VS. SQUIER

Guitar-wise, it's still all about Jazzmasters for J Mascis. This magazine has told the tale before of his visit to a Connecticut music store he dubbed 'Slimy Bob's Guitar Ripoff' in the autumn of 1983. 'He said he had a Strat for $400, so I went there with money I'd saved up over the summer. When I got there all the Strats started at $450! He also had a Jazzmaster for $300 and a Jaguar for $200. I liked the look of the Jaguar, but the Jazzmaster played better.'

An unsentimental J has since sold that first Jazzmaster, a 1965, to the Experience Hendrix Museum in Seattle, but still loves Leo's lesser-loved six-stringer because 'it's the one I learned on, and I'm most used to it playing live.' One he painted purple – 'It was refinished already, so that's the key – buy the refinished ones and you can paint 'em any colour you like!' – was cloned in 2007 to produce the Japanese-made J Mascis Artist Series Jazzmaster.

Last year the marque was 'downgraded' to a Chinese Squier, finished in less dazzling white – but, instead of being affronted, Mascis is delighted. 'The Squier one's a lot cheaper, and a lot of people liked it better than the Fender one. I like it better too.'

The extent of his input on the design front is uncertain, even to the man himself. 'I got them to put a different bridge on,' he says of the Japanese original. The fitting of a Les Paul-style item is a mod he makes to his own guitars.

The pickups are now P90 clones in Jazzmaster covers. 'I don't know about the pickups, I never really got too far into that; I thought people can put new pickups in if they don't like them. I thought it would cost more if we put in special pickups.'

The J Mascis boasts many higher-quality components than the standard Squier Vintage Modified guitar, with which it's comparable. And the fact J himself says 'I play it a lot' makes it a must-try for all fans of the Jazzmaster, let alone the grunge genre.

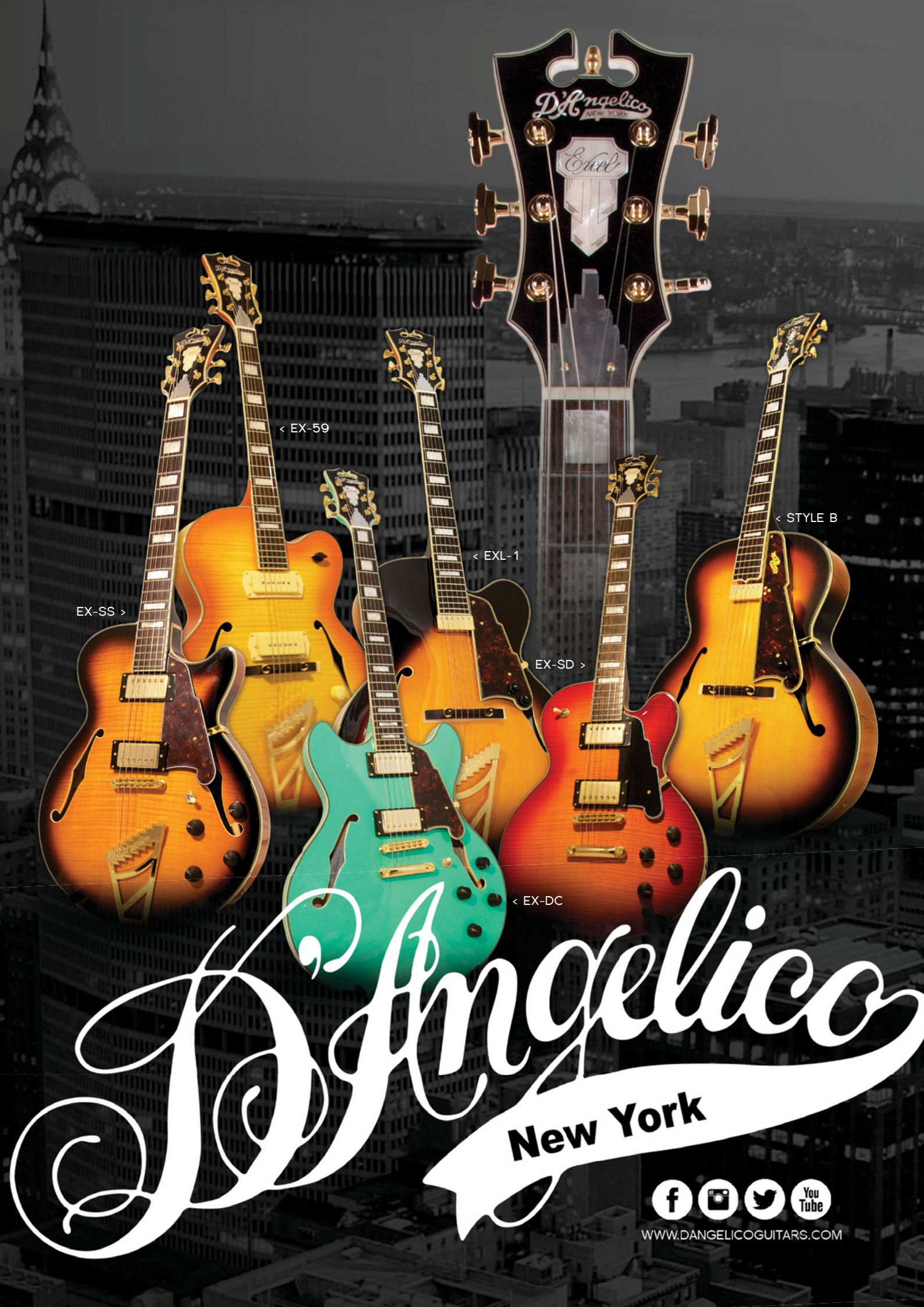
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Photo: Gary Barlow

Ultra Sonics

On top of an OBE and other honours, Midge Ure now has a signature guitar. **Alan Clayson** traces a career that left the runway with glam-rockers Slik and culminated commercially with Ultravox and a solo chart-topper

Lately, Midge Ure has been leading what the economist might call a 'full life'. At the forefront of activities has been the promotion of a new album, *Fragile*, the result of much multiple overdubbing, nearly all by himself, in his private studio – the first purchase he ever made with money generated from Ultravox. The summer has also brought the launch of a Midge Ure signature guitar. Part of the Vintage Icon series, the V100MU was designed by Ure with UK luthier Trev Wilkinson. It's a familiar single-cutaway, arched top, mahogany and maple format, but with stacked P90s and a vibrola tremolo.

'I always thought that that type of guitar should have had a model with the same vibrola as a Firebird or an SG,' explains Midge. 'The nearest I ever saw was a very early '50s goldtop with a trapeze tailpiece. I always imagined those were wonderful... until I played one! The strings were strung under the bridge, making it impossible to damp the strings with your hand.'

Back in 1968, the 15-year-old Midge began an apprenticeship in a mechanical engineering laboratory close to Cambuslang, the Glaswegian suburb where his upbringing had been an of a near-Dickensian hardship. Moreover, the Ures weren't a particularly musical family. 'There wasn't enough room to swing a ukulele in our tenement, let alone a piano – though my dad used to bang on one in his mother's house on a Sunday afternoon,' Midge recalls. 'Our chief source of musical entertainment was the radio. I recall hearing *Sleepwalk* by Santo and Johnny in 1959, which made me marvel at how that wonderful sound was created. Another piece of music that left its mark was Joe Meek's otherworldly production of *Telstar* by the Tornados. It's still really cutting-edge today.'

Midge's first paid musical engagement was as singer and rhythm guitarist with the Stumble Blues Band, named after a Freddie King instrumental on 1967's *A Hard Road* by John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. By 1971, he was focusing on the Top 40 as a member of Salvation – 'a human jukebox' – who were the house band in Clouds, a venue above the renowned Glasgow Apollo, a near-obligatory fixture during UK tours by everyone from the Carpenters to Led Zeppelin. Though the ceiling of Salvation's ambition was simply to make a living, they did try to break out of the cover scene. 'We dabbled with songwriting, but most of our efforts sounded like bad versions of Roxy Music, Bowie or whatever we were listening to at the time,' says Midge. 'It took a while for our writing to assume any kind of individuality.'

Nevertheless, they came to the attention of Bill Martin, half of a songwriting/management team with Phil Coulter, who had scored ➔

Gear

Guitars
Vintage V100MU signature, Gordon Smith SG-2, Gibson SG, Yamaha SG2000, Ibanez Roadstar RS125, Takamine, Crafter and Taylor acoustics

Amps
Vox AC30, Vox Valvetronix AD120VT. Trace Elliot 100-watt head

Effects
Line 6 pedals

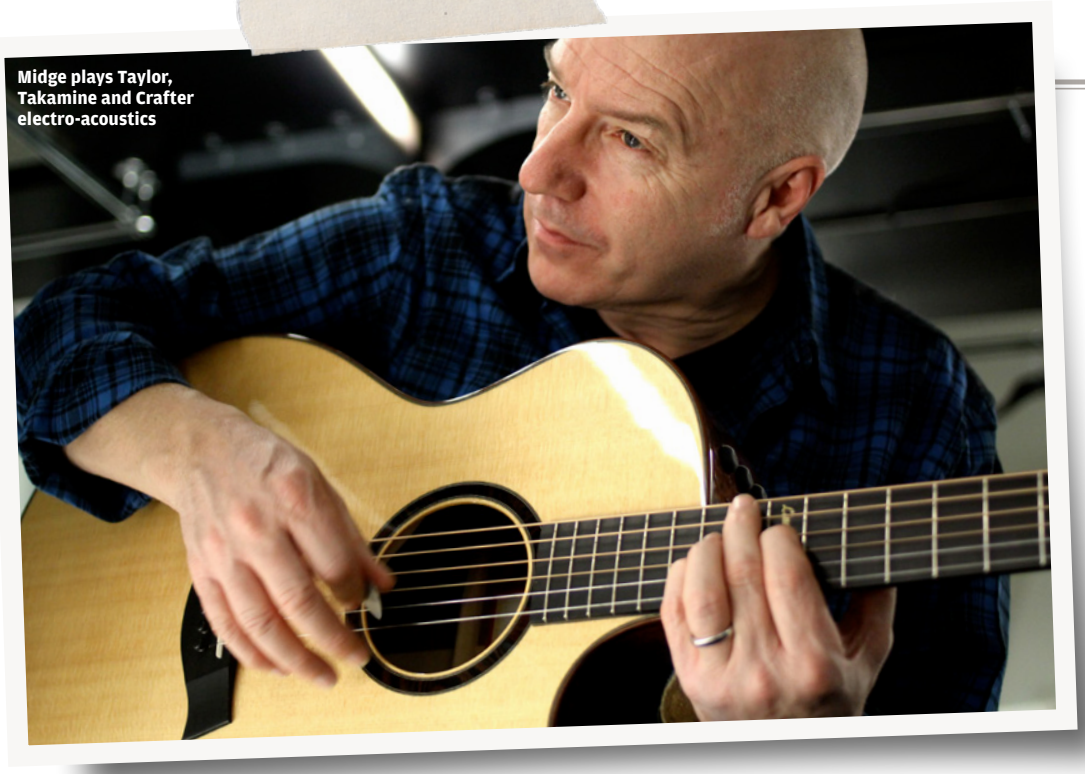

Midge plays Taylor, Takamine and Crafter electro-acoustics

Photo: Andy Siddens

Listen up

SLIK
Slik
(1976)
While this testament to market pragmatism hinged on the band's *Forever And Ever* smash, it also included Midge's *Do It Again* original

RICH KIDS
Ghosts Of Princes In Towers
(1978)
Among four Ure compositions selected were spin-off 45 *Marching Men* and a remake of PVC2's *Put You In The Picture*

ULTRAVOX
Rage In Eden
(1981)
Overseen by kraut-rock boffin Conny Plank, this spawned four strikes in the Top 30 and was Ultravox's biggest seller in the US

VISAGE
The Anvil
(1982)
Opening with *The Damned Don't Cry*, this contained another hit A-side in *Night Train*, also accompanied by an evocative Midge Ure-directed video

Eurovision Song Contest triumphs for Sandie Shaw, Cliff Richard and Dana. They were about to strike gold again with *Remember (Sha La La)* and *Shang-A-Lang* for the Bay City Rollers, while a 1975 LP version of Martin and Coulter's *Forever And Ever* by a singer called Kenny served as a useful demo after they took on Salvation, who had just renamed themselves Slik.

'Bill heard us rehearsing *This Town Ain't Big Enough For Both Of Us* and thought it was the record,' remembered Midge – yet session musicians provided the backing to Slik's version of *Forever And Ever,* which rose to #1 early in 1976. The follow-up, *Requiem,* faltered outside the Top 20, and that was that for Slik, though they soldiered on for a while, even reinventing themselves as punk rockers with the a 1977 single *Put You In The Picture.*

But next came Rich Kids – ex-Sex Pistol Glen Matlock on bass, guitarist Steve New, drummer Rusty Egan, and Midge Ure. 'Glen had come across a single by Slik when flicking through a rack in a record shop,' recollects Midge, 'He got in touch, but, although I'm grateful for that, I thought it was a bit stupid to recruit an old glam-rock pin-up boy after you've just left the most notorious band in the world.

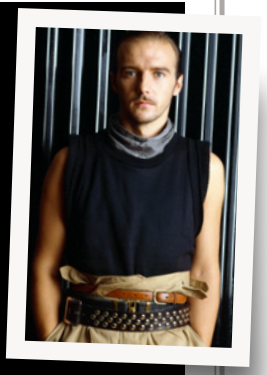
'At the first rehearsal, it was an energetic shambles. Steve hadn't figured out that, before you take a solo, you don't turn the amp up, you use the volume on the guitar! Yet the enthusiasm and drive plus Glen's songwriting and musicianship were very apparent, and we bonded instantly.'

But after a minor eponymous single and album, both Mick Ronson-produced, Rich Kids foundered. 'Glen didn't agree with Rusty and me wanting to blend synth technology with rock instruments,' sighs Midge. 'It was a time of suddenly affordable home recording plus a lot of experimenting with synths and drum machines – but the people with the interesting ideas did interesting things with the tech, and the rest made what they would have anyway irrespective of the instruments they used.'

Certainly in the 'interesting' category, Visage – centred on Ure, Egan and New Romantic scene-maker Steve Strange – was akin in basic approach to Faust, Amon Duul, Can and other Krautrock 'collectives' in that participants were free to engage in other projects, which in Midge's case involved Ultravox and, briefly, Thin Lizzy. The twin peaks of Visage's pop avant-gardening were 1980's *Fade To Grey* and, two years later, *The Anvil* album, both of which went Top 10.

By then, Ultravox had come within an ace of topping the charts with 1981's monumental *Vienna*, which, from a year-old album of the same name, had been

THE THINNEST LIZZY



'I was a fan of Thin Lizzy', relates Midge, 'having heard them as a trio, playing in Glasgow before they had any hits. However, in 1971, I bought their EP, *New Day*, mainly because of the connection between them and Skid Row – which had Gary Moore, who was then just a 16-year-old whizz-kid, flying all over the fretboard – who I'd also been to see a few times as an aspiring guitarist.

'Not long afterwards, I noticed Phil Lynott on the streets of Glasgow when I was driving Salvation's van. I gave him a lift to my mum's house and fed him egg and chips. He remembered that when our paths crossed in London after I'd just joined Rich Kids, and we started hanging out together.'

Their lives were to interweave professionally when Ure assisted Lynott in the composition of *Get Out Of Here* on Thin Lizzy's *Black Rose* album as well as a Lynott solo 45, *Yellow Pearl* (best remembered as the *Top Of The Pops* theme music) – and as guitarist, on two remakes of old tracks picked for the group's 1979 compilation, *The Continuing Saga Of The Ageing Orphans*.

So Ure was approached to step in when Gary Moore quit shortly before a US tour. 'It was like one of those Hollywood movies where a star breaks a leg and a chorus girl steps in and shines,' jokes Midge, 'though everyone knew I was always going back to Ultravox.' He also stayed on for a Japanese tour, though by this timer Lynott had requested that he switch to keyboards.

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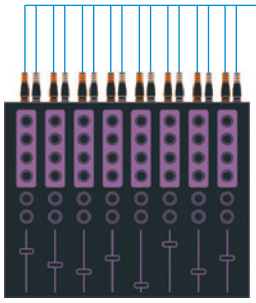

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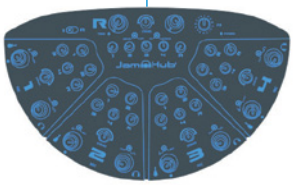

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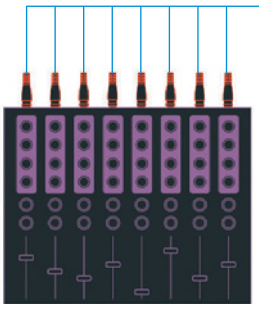

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Ure's Vintage signature guitar is already a stage mainstay

Photo: Andy Siddens

Listen up

MIDGE URE
The Gift
(1985)
After *If I Was*, this offering's *That Certain Smile* and *Wastelands* were smaller chart entries, but entries all the same

MIDGE URE
Fragile
(2014)
'The sum of your influences makes you who you are musically,' says Ure, and that summarises 10 hand-tooled vocal and instrumental items

And another thing...

On BBC Scotland's yearly Hogmanay Live in 1995, Midge, at the suggestion of accordionist Phil Cunningham, gave 'em a revival of Andy Stewart's *A Scottish Soldier* magnum opus dating from 1960.

preceded on spin-off 45 by *Sleepwalk* (not the Santo and Johnny opus) and *Passing Strangers*. Later achievements were almost as hefty – with 1984 a particularly fat year, what with *Dancing With Tears In My Eyes* at #3 and *The Collection* – a retrospective – high in the album list. More insidiously, Ultravox's impact rippled across decades of pop, especially in locations where trance, ambient-techno, acid house and further sub-divisions of the Modern Dance held sway.

'People said it was a natural progression from what I'd been doing with Visage and Ultravox,' shrugs Midge, 'but most of that dance stuff was an aberration. You'd hear a tune that you like, but it would be ruined by a synthesiser bass running right through the chords, clashing and grating and sounding hideous. It was a world that I didn't want to inhabit.' Nonetheless, in 2004, he was to be to the fore on *Something To Remind Me*, the single from *Tripomatic Fairytales 3003* by Jam And Spoon, German specialists in electro-trance who, because they wrote songs as opposed to merely producing productions, he found 'a very acceptable conduit to that world'.

The publicity value of the Ultravox mainstay's contribution to this album was buttressed by his successful solo career traceable to a hit revival of The Walker Brothers' *No Regrets* in 1982. For the next three years, however, Ure was preoccupied with Ultravox. 'It was becoming more and more complicated – and we refused to use backing tracks or pre-programmed sequencers,' he muses. 'If there was a difficult way to scratch your nose, we came up with it! We couldn't just turn up somewhere and play. Everything had to be thought out and discussed. That's partly why we never cracked America. We could fill places there with a capacity of maybe two thousand, but after we took the next logical step of opening for a stadium headliner, our soundchecks would take five hours.

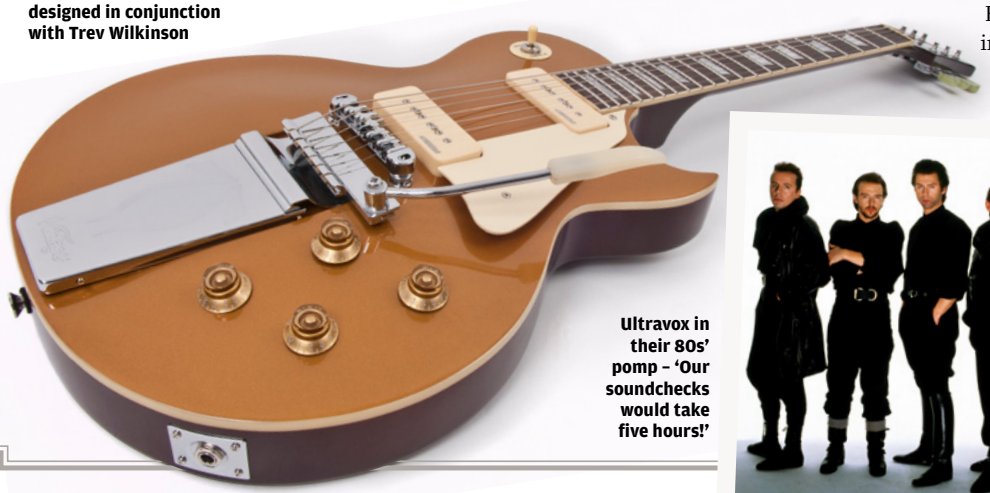
'I wanted to do something much simpler. I'd just built my studio – and before I knew it I had an album, *The Gift*, made there when Ultravox was taking a six month break. Chrysalis decided to release it, and suddenly I was a solo artist.' Issued as a single, *The Gift*'s *If I Was* opening track knocked Mick Jagger and David Bowie's *Dancing In The Street* from #1. This song, of course, was Jagger and Bowie's joint contribution to Live Aid – which was to earn Ure an eventual OBE, chiefly for his role as Bob Geldof's behind-the-scenes assistant, but also for co-writing and producing the fund-raising *Do They Know It's Christmas* – 'a song with a weird structure and no chorus' – by an all-star choir.

Midge and Ultravox also appeared in the British section of the correlated satellite-linked spectacular – by which time he'd been pondering a life apart from the group. Yet, while *Call Of The Wild* and 1991's *Cold Cold Heart* penetrated the Top 30, and *Breathe* – which soundtracked a TV commercial – did the same in mainland Europe, sales for other pot-shots at the charts and attendant albums paled against those for, say, 1993's *If I Was: The Very Best Of Midge Ure And Ultravox*. It was foreseeable, therefore, that the two factions would reunite on stage, an event timed to coincide roughly with the thirtieth anniversary of the *Vienna* album. The latter-day Ultravox also returned to the studio for 2012's *Brilliant* album though Midge has continued to pursue other ventures, most recently with Fragile – and as singer on *International Blue*, an album masterminded by veteran producer Tony Visconti and Holland's Stephen Emmer, a musical jack-of-all-trades.

Finally, there's the recognition inherent in the existence of the Vintage V100MU signature guitar. 'It's probably a bit late in the day,' smiles Midge, 'but I'm now as well known as a guitarist as I am a singer. While there's evidence of absorbing all sorts of styles – a bit of Mick Ronson here, a bit of Eric Clapton there – what comes out at the end is all me.'

Special thanks to James Ure and Jim Soars

Ure's Vintage V100MU designed in conjunction with Trev Wilkinson



Ultravox in their 80s' pomp – 'Our soundchecks would take five hours!'

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Photo: Josh Gelman

Animal Magnetism

Though his professional life was defined by his time with a world-famous 1960s R&B group, Hilton Valentine began as a skiffler – and now he has rediscovered himself as one. Interview by **Alan Clayson**

'Hilton's guitar thing made *House Of The Rising Sun*,' estimated Animals drummer John Steel. 'Practically everybody in the world who picked up the guitar for the first time then started on that.' As well as delivering those unforgettable guitar arpeggios and playing on the rest of an unbroken run of hit singles, Hilton Valentine also cut a vibrant and striking figure whenever he appeared on TV screens during the '60s – which was often. His subsequent musical ventures, however, have always been measured against his achievements with the Animals – a band whose history was punctuated more than most with the discords that make pop groups what they are.

Yet, even after a rancourous split in 1966, there remained a personal unity between the founding members – Valentine, Steel, singer Eric Burdon, bass guitarist Chas Chandler and keyboard player Alan Price. No matter how far their wanderings, they still kept in touch, via such as a low profile album – 1977's *Before We Were So Rudely Interrupted* – and episodic reunion bashes in their native Tyneside, where Hilton Valentine was born in 1943.

Hilton may have been landed with an extremely pop-starrish name, but as a 16-year-old school-leaver he took a job as a loader at North Shields Fish Quay. His objectives, however, were more glamorous. 'Rock'n'roll was starting to happen,' he says. 'Chuck Berry and Lonnie Donegan were my greatest influences, but I also listened hard to Scotty Moore, Cliff Gallup and Link Wray.' In 1956, he acquired a plywood acoustic guitar, and took lessons. 'But I jacked them in,' he adds, 'after I bought a book called *Teach Yourself A Thousand Chords*.'

The next step was to form the Heppers, a band described by the *Shields Daily News* as 'young but promising skiffle group'. The Heppers evolved into the Wildcats, who traded mostly in current Top 20 and classic rock, and included vocalist Keith Shields and second guitarist (and future Animals road manager) Tappy Wright. By now, Hilton was picking a hollowbody Framus to which he had fitted a magnetic pickup, fed through a radio. With the purchase of a Rosetti Lucky 7 plus a Stadium Truvoice amplifier, a pattern was established whereby each succeeding instrument was an improvement on the one before. 'After a Hofner Club 60, I went to a Futurama III, then a Burns Vibra Artist, and, in 1962, a Gretsch Tennessean,' he says. 'The Gretsch was put through a Selmer Stadium – with a cranking 14 watts – before I moved on to a Selmer Twin Selectortone with the push-button tone selectors. Coupled with the Gretsch, this was my first good guitar and amp set-up.'

The Gretsch and the Selmer were heard on a 10" long-player, *Sounds Of The Wildcats*, taped at Newcastle's Morton Sound, one of the more sophisticated ↦

Gear

Guitars
Martin DC Aura six-string and Martin 12-string acoustics, Fender Custom Shop Thinline Telecaster

Amp
Vox AC30TBX with treble boost and Alnico Blue speakers

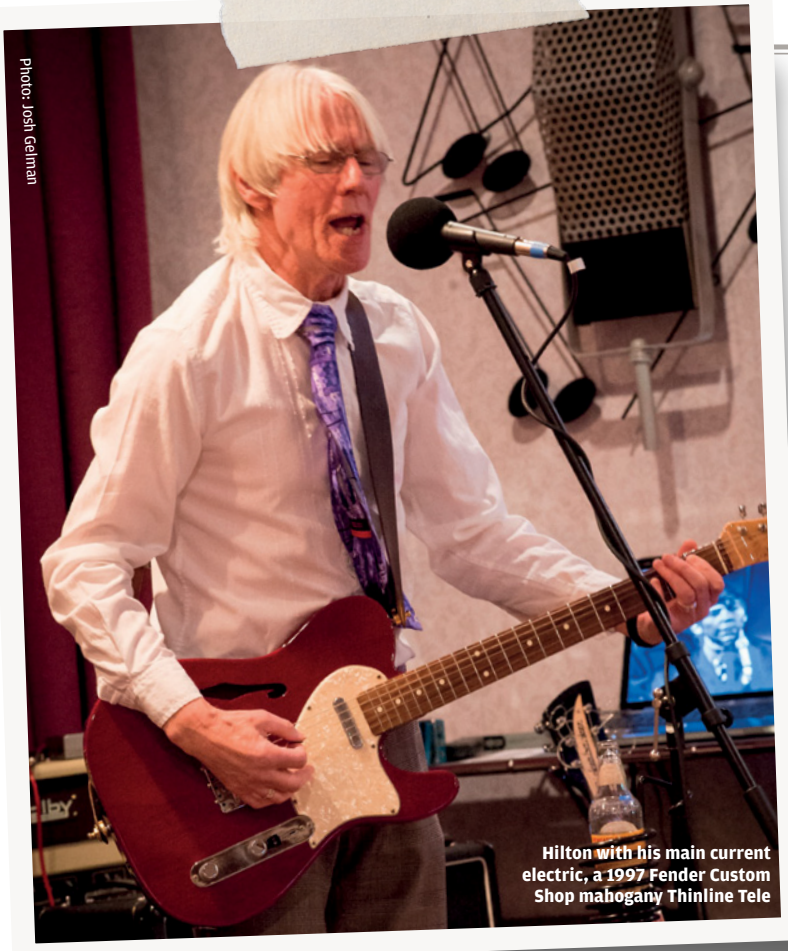
Photo: Josh Gelman

Hilton with his main current electric, a 1997 Fender Custom Shop mahogany Thinline Tele

studios outside London. The disc's mere existence was a yardstick of achievement in a regional scene which was as self-contained as Merseybeat. The Wildcats were a cut above the Alan Price Rhythm & Blues Combo, consisting then of Alan Price, Eric Burdon, John Steel, and Chas Chandler, who headhunted Valentine after catching a Wildcats recital at Whitley Bay's Rex Hotel (during which Hilton tore off his shirt and rolled on his back like a man possessed). Considering local acclaim to be the ceiling of the Wildcats' ambition, Hilton pledged himself to the Combo. 'I'd never heard of Jimmy Reed or John Lee Hooker, though,' he adds. 'It wasn't so much the blues as rhythm and blues. Yet it was just amazing... particularly Eric's singing.'

Eric Burdon puts the credit back at Valentine's door. 'I don't think the element of rock was in the band until we found Hilton,' he counters. 'Hilton wasn't just playing rock'n'roll, he looked rock'n'roll with a greased mop of hair combed back, cheap leather jacket, winkle picker shoes, black jeans and a smile on his face, playing through an Echoplex – which was a secret weapon back then.'

For an exhausting few weeks, Valentine was on the boards with both the Wildcats in Whitley Bay and the Combo during a lengthy season at the Downbeat, a club balanced above a semi-derelict warehouse near Newcastle's docks. By the time the Combo moved to the more upmarket Club-a-Go-Go towards the end of '63, the sweaty, intense performances had earned them the name 'The Animals', which they adopted officially.

Too hot for the north-east to hold, the climb of maiden single *Baby Let Me Take You Home* into the Top 30 paved the way for *House Of The Rising Sun*, a traditional folk blues. 'The first version I heard was on Bob Dylan's first album in 1962,' Hilton reveals. 'He strummed it. I just started playing arpeggios, and it seemed to work.' *House Of The Rising Sun* soared to the top of the charts on both sides of the Atlantic, and the band undertook several North American tours to wild acclaim; on their first touch-down in New York, they were greeted by a screaming crowd and then driven to the hotel in separate open-top convertibles.

Back in England, they relocated to London where Burdon and Price composed the follow-up, *I'm Crying*, which, with Hilton's assertive riffing to the fore, was a smaller global smash – but a smash all the same. So were *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood, We Gotta Get Out Of This Place, It's My Life* and 1966's *Don't Bring Me Down* – on which Valentine employed, respectively, a Vox Teardrop 12-string, a six-string Rose Morris-imported Rickenbacker, a Rickenbacker 12-string and a 1966 Telecaster, nearly all of them presented to him by the companies concerned in exchange for his endorsement. *Don't Bring Me Down* – and *Outcast*, a 1966 B-side – were also notable for Valentine's use of a WEM fuzz; 'I was trying to emulate a rasping baritone sax off old rock'n'roll records.' An *NME* popularity poll had the Animals breathing down the necks of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, despite the departure of Price, who was succeeded eventually by The Mike Cotton Sound's Dave Rowberry.

As 1966 dawned, the Animals recorded *Inside Looking Out*, almost wilfully uncommercial, lacking a discernible melody to carry its harrowing prison narrative. 'I was wary at first,' reflects Hilton, 'but, as it developed, I really liked it.' As an A-side, it stalled outside the Top 30 in the USA. Then came the US-only *Animalism*, on which Frank Zappa arranged two tracks. The fact that Zappa and some Los Angeles session hirelings played on some of the songs was symptomatic of the fragmenting state of an ➔

VALENTINE'S VISIONS

The break-up of the Animals in 1966 was triggered partly by the social division into those who took LSD and those who didn't. In his perpetual self-manufactured sunglasses with red bicycle reflectors for lenses, Hilton belonged to the former contingent. 'I was flooded with immense knowledge about life and the universe, and began taking more and more acid to try to recapture that feeling, which was the stupidest thing I could possibly do. My musical tastes changed, too. I got very into Donovan and the Beatles, who were writing about acid at the time.' Eric Burdon: 'Hilton was to develop this curious phobia about never changing the strings on his guitar. If one broke, he'd replace it. Otherwise, they didn't get touched.'.

It was in Hollywood, of all places, that Hilton mastered his inner chaos. 'I tried meditation, fasting, yoga and all of that until I reached the point where I thought, "This is absolutely ridiculous. I'm turning myself inside out here". Then I heard about the Nichiren Shoshu branch of Buddhism, and, in 1972, I was badgered to go to a meeting. I was expecting the usual – bald heads, yellow robes, lots of talk about transcending and the ninth consciousness and all that – but it was just people with ordinary jobs, using this practice to put their lives in some sort of order. I'd always been trying to escape my life until then. So I started practicing Buddhism and began to realise that this is where it's all at.'

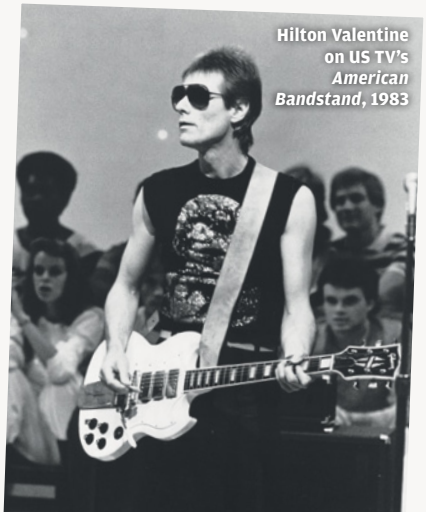
Hilton Valentine on US TV's *American Bandstand*, 1983

Photo: Chris Walter / Getty Images

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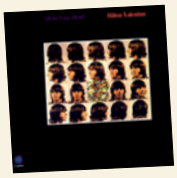
Hilton Valentine with Rickenbacker on *Ready Steady Go*, 1965

Photo: Popperphoto / Getty Images

Listen up

THE ANIMALS
Animal Tracks
(1965)
A fine mid-'60s set capturing the Animals in concert in full force

HILTON VALENTINE
All In Your Head
(1969)
Restrained and understated, with Hilton delivering 11 self-penned 'modern day nursery rhymes'



THE ANIMALS
Ark
(1983)
The band's native grit captured, for once, in a fairly co-operative atmosphere

SKIFFLEDOG
It's Folk 'N' Skiffle, Mate!
(2004)
Retro reworkings of Donovan, Lennon and *Peace* from Hilton's 1969 album

And another thing...

Annoyed by constant knocking, Hilton once fired a pistol at a dressing room door, narrowly missing the stage manager – and causing the Animals' banishment from the venue for life

Animals blighted by internal dissensions. Sure enough, Barry Jenkins from The Nashville Teens soon took over from John Steel.

In the wake of the break-up, there was a rumour that Valentine was to start a new ensemble with ex-Yardbirds bassist Paul Samwell-Smith and Graham Gouldman, then a songwriter with the Mockingbirds. Instead, Hilton went behind the scenes, overseeing the self-composed *It's All In Your Head*, a pot-shot at the charts by actress Natasha Pyne and a version of Donovan's *Hey Gyp (Dig The Slowness)* for Keith Shields. Back in Tyneside, the Animals reassembled for a concert at Newcastle City Hall. 'We just met on the day,' shrugs Hilton, 'and kicked a few numbers around. It was as if we'd never separated – straight into rows about what we were going to do, how we were going to do it... and could we do it anyway?'

> *'Now I've come full circle. I loved playing skiffle then, and I still do now'*

The following year, Valentine received a plane ticket to LA to record on Eric Burdon's 1969 solo offering, *All In Your Head*. From the same period emerged an album by Ujar Kapiv – Valentine, Jenkins and, on keyboards, Stan Hayward, once of the New Vaudeville Band – who caught a post-Woodstock drift of pastoral introspection. Valentine would base himself in California until the original Animals reached back over the years again with *Before We Were So Rudely Interrupted*. 'Once we started knuckling down to it, I quite enjoyed the experience. It was "This is what we are now". I never heard any discussions about, "Will we try to make it sound more like what we used to sound like?" We just took numbers and played them, and whatever came out, that was it.'

After the dust settled, Valentine returned to England – and was living back in North Shields – when the Animals reconvened in 1983 for a world tour, for which purpose Tappy Wright loaned him a white Gibson SG (once owned by Jimi Hendrix). Augmented by a percussionist plus Zoot Money on keyboards and guitarist Steve Grant, the Geordie boys delivered the goods once again, though not even the most susceptible of their sold-out stadium audiences could pretend that that was what it must have been like in the Downbeat club back in 1963.

Another poignant event was Hilton and Tappy's reformation of the Wildcats for a mid-week residency in a Whitley Bay hotel. This prefaced a reunion of the Animals in the mid-1990s – well, not so much the Animals as 'an' Animals. Concentrating on the back catalogue, Animals II contained only Valentine, Steel and Dave Rowberry from the 1960s line-up, yet Hilton's 100 per cent proof stage presence remained intact, and vocalist Robert Kane had all of Eric Burdon's unflagging lung power. Nonetheless, Valentine's marriage in 1997 prompted an uprooting to Connecticut, and enlistment into a US-based outfit led by Eric Burdon. After Hilton's departure in 2008, Burdon instructed replacement Eric McFaddon to imitate Hilton Valentine for certain songs; 'But he hadn't got the technical tools. They don't exist anymore. Eric promised me that he's going to look for the right sound gadgets to achieve what Hilton did.'

Hilton himself needed no such gadgets for 2004's back-to-the-roots LP *It's Folk'n'Skiffle, Mate!*, attributed to Skiffledog, playing raggedly carefree gigs around Connecticut and the adjacent states. Rough-and-ready spontaneity was also the philosophy behind the live-in-the-studio *Skiffledog Of Coburg Street* and December 2011's *Merry Skifflemas*, a collaboration with another expat Brit, 'Big Boy Pete' Miller, with whom Hilton had been friends since 1963 when he was singing guitarist with East Anglia's Peter Jay and the Jaywalkers, one-hit-wonders with *Can Can '62* (Pete had once used Hilton's Gretsch Tennessean and Selmer Twin Selectortone during a date in Newcastle after his own was stolen). 'I wanted to put a skiffle band together back in England a few years ago,' reflects Hilton, 'but it never happened because I was too busy on the road playing with John and Dave. Now I've come full circle. I loved playing skiffle then, and I still do now.'

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BURNS
Club Series King Cobra

How do you make a good thing even better? If you're Burns London, then you simply add a sweet upmarket version of your recently-launched Cobra to the roster. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

At just £249, the Burns Cobra got a big thumbs-up for both sound and value for money in July's *G&B* (issue 25/10). However, the materials, build quality and the finish were appropriate for its lower-market price tag. Now, hot off the boat from China, we have the King Cobra, a guitar that pushes that model's specifications significantly further. For just £40 more, you get a bound Indian rosewood fingerboard with block inlays, a hard-rock maple neck (with a scarf joint only as part of the headstock), locking tuners, and a proper alder body... and if you fancy splashing out a further £20, you can have a tasty Canadian maple flame top just like the one on our review guitar.

The Cobra is based on the '90s Drifter Custom. The double-cut body shape has a full and rounded form reminiscent of the '70s (and in another connection to that decade, the King Cobra is not a lightweight instrument). At the same time the richness of the two-tone vintage sunburst and the mint green separated scratchplate seems to echo more of a '50s or '60s aesthetic – a little bit like a Hofner, or a Framus.

The neck's gloss polyurethane finish also feels quite '70s, but it's wider and flatter than the Fender equivalent of that era and there's a definite 'Burns' feel to it. The medium-gauge fretting is excellent and the white edge binding and the block markers add a touch

Alder body with an all-over sunburst

Original peghead and locking tuners

For just £40 more than the Cobra you get a bound, block inlaid fingerboard, locking tuners and a proper alder body

of class which is a little reminiscent of Gibson. While many contemporary Burns fingerboards are buffed to a shine, this one exhibits the even dryness you'd expect from quality Indian rosewood; it feels very good under the fingers. The zero fret we encountered on the basic Cobra model (a spec that may be changed in time) is absent here, so the first-position feel will be more familiar to the majority of today's players. Guitars without a zero fret require a much more precise set up, and the result here is very good, with the intonation between fretted and open strings being spot-on.

One of the uniquely Burns features of the King Cobra is the trio of Mini Tri-Sonic pickups. Created by Adrian Turner, these are designed to emulate the classic, larger-format vintage pickup's sound but in a smaller footprint, and this offers advantages in manufacturing as they can fit into a standard S-type rout. It also makes them ideal as replacement

FACTFILE
BURNS CLUB SERIES KING COBRA

DESCRIPTION
Solidbody electric guitar. Made in China.
PRICE **£299.99, or £319.99 with flamed maple top**

BUILD **Hard rock maple bolt-on neck with 22-fret Indian rosewood fingerboard, three-piece alder bod, knife-edge vibrato, unbranded locking machineheads**
ELECTRICS **Three Mini Tri-Sonic pickups, master volume and independent tone controls (with push/pull action for two extra pickup settings), five-way selector switch**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Honeyburst, fiesta red, redburst, green sunburst**

SCALE LENGTH
647mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 42.8mm
12th fret 53.2mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.5mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35.8mm
Bridge 53mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.8mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **3.7kg/8.2lbs**

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RRP **£325**

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RRP **£299**

The regular-size Tri-Sonics give this a guitar a very different flavour

pickups for players wanting to add Burns character to another brand of instrument without having to modify the body. In order to retain the same character the design continues to use a pair of ceramic magnets and a loose wire coil, and as they retail at £120 a set, you can begin to see what good value the King Cobra represents.

The controls include a master volume and individual tones for the neck and middle pickups. A five-way switch gives the usual selections, but there's an extra: if you pull up on the lowermost tone control, the neck pickup is added to whichever switch selection you happen to have chosen (unless it's already on, of course). This gives you two additional voices: neck/bridge, and neck/middle/bridge. Both the standard Cobra and Marquee are wired like this.

Sounds

The Cobra has a bright, clear acoustic signature, and our initial impression is that the tone is a little warmer and less brash than the standard Cobra. Once plugged in, the difference between the two instruments is even greater than expected – perhaps illustrating the difference body timber can make. Whereas the Cobra's bridge pickup sounded a little flat in the midrange, the King Cobra rings like a bell, making it ideal for clear, bright chords and intricate picking.

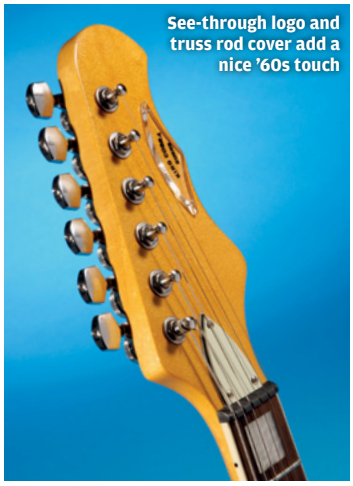
All the basic pickup voices are very good, with each offering a slightly different version of this richly detailed clarity. The 'out of phase' positions deliver plenty of pick edge click and a funky quack that's at least as pronounced as on the Fender equivalent. The neck pickup is smooth and rich with a broad-spectrum sound that delivers clear mids and a polished low-end. Things get even better when you pull up the tone pot; singer-songwriters and lovers of jazzy and melodic playing will appreciate the neck/bridge sound, and the ability to dial in all three pickups at the same time is excellent as this gives the most accurate approximation of the King Cobra's natural acoustic tone.

Gradually increasing amp gain brings on a range of gnarly, edgy blues and rock rhythm sounds that are uniquely Burns-esque in flavour. It's a character that's hard to pin down, but the pickups are slightly microphonic in a way that emphasises the dynamics of each note, ensuring good separation and clarity, but with a slightly brash, choppy feel. This makes for a pleasingly rough amp distortion and a unique rhythm sound... it's the classic Tri-Sonic flavour.

Driving an amp harder brings on massive rock chords and scorching leads. The standard Cobra seemed a little better at the wailing Brian May-style sound, but this impression changes when you start to fiddle with the tone controls. Designer Alan Entwistle has voiced each of the two circuits slightly differently, giving good potential for smoothing and filtering to create all manner of classic lead sounds. The King Cobra also performs well with pedal distortion, and it works fine with very processed lead sounds.

Verdict

The King Cobra is pretty superb; the regular Cobra is a solid performer, but this King version offers some of the nuances and refinements of an instrument from a much higher price bracket. It also sounds distinctly like a Burns, so it's a great way to add a unique character to your guitar stash without busting the bank. The mini Tri-Sonics really do nail the character of the larger-format original versions, and the result is great fun to work with. If you're a player who likes to use an infinite array of clean and slightly distorted voices, this guitar will continue to surprise you; punky, thrashy players will love its rhythm style, but it also delivers more traditional lead sounds, and it gives good Brian May – a sound that you can't really nail without Tri-Sonics. At this price it's excellent value, so if you're in the market for an instrument under £350, you need to check one out.


See-through logo and truss rod cover add a nice '60s touch

A push-pull tone knob adds the neck pickup to any selector position

FINAL SCORE

BURNS CLUB SERIES KING COBRA	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

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B3
Phoenix Driftwood

Mixing vintage guitar designs is all the rage, and this USA-built custom puts the Big F and the Big G in a blender and cranks the speed up to max. Review by **Huw Price**

It's a familiar formula these days. Take a bit of a certain iconic guitar, mix it with elements artfully chosen from another, and hey presto, you've come up with a design that's new but also has instant appeal. The Premier Builders Guild is an umbrella organisation for various amp and guitar manufacturers including Fano, Two-Rock, Tone King and Koll. Gene Baker is the outfit's Chief Guitar Master Builder, and the Phoenix Driftwood we're reviewing this month comes from Baker's own B3 guitar line.

The influences behind the Phoenix Driftwood are obvious; 'a Tele on steroids has a collision with a Firebird', says B3. Yes, a Gibson Firebird, with its unique combination of through-neck and stepped body; there are plenty of Firebird copies out there, but very few have the authentic through-neck construction like the Phoenix.

Building guitars with through-necks is tricky and expensive, but Gene Baker has done it properly. The 'through' section is as wide as the neck, and the body is formed from glued-on 'wings' that are top-routed to create a raised central section. The body and neck are mahogany, and the neck is all of a piece with no heel stack or scarf joints. In true Firebird style there's a tummy tuck at the back and a simple rosewood fingerboard with pearl dots.

Although later Firebirds had P90 pickups, mini-humbuckers are a prerequisite for classic Firebird sounds, and the Phoenix has two of them. The Tele influence comes into play with a Barden bridge with slanted brass saddles and a stacked, noiseless Dimarzio Area T bridge pickup. The T-type control layout looks stock, but the tone knob doubles up as a push/pull coil tap switch for the mini-humbuckers, and the switch is a five-way.

The headstock is Baker's own design, and we think it suits the guitar. The strings follow a straight path to vintage-style Tone Pros Kluson tuners, and the shape of the trussrod cover is actually that of the headstock in reverse.

As for the build quality, it's top-drawer modern production standard. The fretwork is precise and the edges of the board are gently rolled over for comfort. The poly finish can't be faulted; it's like a modern twist on TV yellow. Predominantly off-white, the grain is highlighted in dark brown and the effect is not unlike chocolate chip ice cream. Yummy... but if a poly finish isn't ➔

Tone Pros tuners on an asymmetrical headstock

Tasty off-white finish with dark grain filler

The influences behind the Phoenix Driftwood are obvious: 'A Tele on steroids has a collision with a Firebird'

FACTFILE
B3 PHOENIX DRIFTWOOD

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody electric. Made in the USA**
PRICE **£2499 inc. case**

BUILD **Solid mahogany body, 22-fret through-body mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard, Joe Barden bridge, Tone Pros machineheads**
ELECTRICS **Two Dimarzio mini humbucking pickups, 1 Dimarzio Area T pickup, 5-way switch, master volume and tone with coil tap push/pull switch**
LEFT-HANDERS **TBC**
FINISH **Very extensive range (check website)**

SCALE LENGTH
648mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 52mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 18mm
12th fret 22mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 36mm
Bridge 54mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **3.3kg/7.26lbs**

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Coley
CW-3
Inspired by the Epiphone Crestwood, this handbuilt guitar is made from Brazilian and Cuban mahogany with a set neck, Bigsby vibrato and three mini-humbucker pickups
RRP **£1200**

Tappable mini-humbuckers are by Jason Lollar

Barden bridge with Dimarzio Area T pickup

for you, a nitro-cellulose finish is an option, and these are also available in various grades of relicing.

Sounds

One Firebird feature that Baker has wisely sidestepped is the neck-heaviness. With no off-kilter centre of gravity or heavy 'banjo' tuners, the lightweight Phoenix balances superbly on the strap and in the lap. Acoustically it's bright and chimey, but there's extra sustain and a more even response than you'd expect from a regular T-type.

We first encountered the mini-humbucker/Tele bridge combo on a Fender '52 Hot Rod Tele some years ago. The Phoenix brings back happy memories of that fine guitar but adds a whole lot more. The through-neck and all-mahogany construction give the Phoenix an SG-style grunt, growl and harmonic complexity that's all too often wasted on mediocre humbuckers. Not so these rather remarkable mini-humbuckers, which combine ballsy aggression and fat mids with a wide-open high frequency response that's almost Fender-like. It's a unique tone that's articulate, touch-sensitive, super-clear and cuts right through a mix. Sustain is effortless and there's no shortage of dynamic response or touch sensitivity. These pickups even do the 'note bloom' trick that some associate with vintage PAFs, harmonic overtones shifting as you hang onto a note.

The output of the Area T pickup balances well with the others, but with extra bite and twang. An out-and-out vintage replica bridge pickup might have been too much of a contrast, so the fatter, more modern voicing of the Area T is a better fit.

The Phoenix is one of those guitars that are equally adept at clean stuff and high-gain shredding. The tonal range spans blues, contemporary rock, country and even metal. When you activate the coil tap, the pickup combinations become almost Strat-like – especially the in-between positions. You can even order this guitar with a vibrato bridge and S-style control layout, and with pretty much any combination of pickups you want.

Master tone knob pulls up to coil-tap both humbuckers

Individual ferrules are replaced by a sustain block set into the body

Some retro hybrids are best on paper but this is a light, comfortable, well-balanced blend of simplicity and style

Verdict

Retro 'hybrid' guitars are often best on paper, and some demonstrate why certain timber, neck joint and pickup combinations were never used back in the day and why they should never be used again. In contrast, the B3 Phoenix is a triumph – a light, comfortable, well-balanced blend of simplicity and style. The only negative thing we would mention is the squared-off edge of the Barden bridge, which can dig into your palm, but other than that, the Phoenix plays and sounds as good as it looks.

FINAL SCORE

B3 PHOENIX DRIFTWOOD	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**19**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**19**/20
TOTAL	**91%**

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RIVERA
Jazz Suprema 112

Big, beautiful cleans may be under-represented in today's amp market, but this Rivera is aiming to put that right. Review by **Richard Purvis**

If you ask a dozen designers to come up with the perfect amp for throaty British overdrive, starting with nothing but a blank sheet of paper and a purple crayon, at least half of them will probably begin by drawing a pair (or quartet) of EL34 output valves. These are the signature tubes of hard-rocking Marshall/Orange grind, and they love to distort like Count von Count from *Sesame Street* loves to count. So, here's a solid-looking 50W combo packing two EL34s and a Celestion G12T-75 – Yngwie Malmsteen's favourite speaker – meaning it can only be time to don some black leather and get down to some heavy riffing.

Or is it? No, you grubby hooligan, it most certainly isn't. This amp has the word 'Jazz' in its name, and while that's also true of not-very-jazzy gear like the Fender Jazz Bass and Jazzmaster, in this case they mean it. Rivera has designed this 1x12" combo with archtop-slingers in mind, and those big valves have been set up for maximum clean headroom – though, being EL34s, they'll surely roughen up a bit if you push them.

It's a compact amp but deceptively heavy, partly because of the large transformers (the mains trannie is a whopper) and partly because it measures over a foot from front to back.

Spacious cabinet houses a capable Celestion normally used on high-gain amps

Rivera has designed this combo with archtop-slingers in mind, and those big valves are set up for maximum headroom

There's a clear three inches of empty cabinet behind the chassis and speaker, presumably just to add resonance. A short reverb tray sits at the bottom, and the chassis is suspended from the top of the cab by eight medium-sized bolts. The leather strap looks tough but, unless you spent the summer at bus-lifting camp, you might prefer to hump this thing around with both hands.

Let's not forget to appreciate the look. Whether or not the strip down the middle of the speaker grille has any sound-diffusing properties, it certainly adds to the 'jazz age' vibe, and the discreet gold piping makes its own contribution to the sense of quiet class. Round the back we can see that all the glassware is chassis-mounted and hangs down into the void, with the ➔

FACTFILE
JAZZ SUPREMA 112

DESCRIPTION **50W 1x12" combo; 3 x ECC83 and 2 x EL34 valves. Made in USA**
PRICE **£1495**

FRONT PANEL **High and Low inputs; Volume, Treble (pull for Bright), Middle (pull for Notch), Bass, Reverb; Footswitch input for reverb; Master volume, Focus (pull for Fat), Presence; Standby and Power switches**
REAR PANEL **Two 8-16ohm speaker outputs, Line out; FX loop send and return with level controls**
DIMENSIONS **53cm wide, 46cm high, 30.5cm deep**
WEIGHT **22kg/49lbs**

CONTACT **Chandler Guitars 020 8940 5874 www.chandlerguitars.co.uk www.rivera.com**

Like this? Try this...

Fender
'65 Twin Reverb
A Fender Twin will always be the first option for those in search of big, sparkly cleans, and it's a popular jazz amp
RRP **£1750**

Roland
JC-120
The infamously pristine Jazz Chorus is still around... and Albert King made good use of its clean bite
RRP **£1129**

Rivera
Venus Deux
This 1x12" combo looks almost identical to the Jazz Suprema but it's a slightly more rock-minded 25-watter, powered by 6V6s
RRP **£1395**

Three-band EQ plus Bright and Fat settings and an optional notch control

three preamp valves protected by metal covers and the two big ones gripped at the base by brackets. And on the inside? Rivera does not go in for hand-wiring but it's neat, and the output valves are wired up to a separate PCB from the preamp section.

The front panel has a couple of features that should pique stool-dwelling beboppers and crowd-surfing funk-metallers alike. On the left, between preamp Volume and Reverb level, we find a three-way tonestack with two pull-out options: a Bright boost on the Treble knob and a voice-modifying Notch on the Middle. On the right, there's Master volume and a couple of dials for messing with the negative feedback loop: Focus (Rivera describes this as a speaker-damping function) and Presence. You can pull out the Focus control for a Fat boost.

There's one more thing to mention on the back panel: an FX loop, with send and return level controls. True, Wes Montgomery got by alright without an FX loop, but fusion fans might find a use for this – and maybe it suggests us rock'n'roll guttersnipes haven't been completely forgotten.

Sound

Right, let's turn down the lights, spark up a herbal cigarette for that *Jazz Club* vibe – nice! – and plug in a suitably refined archtop. My first instinct when trying out an amp with master volume is to jam it round to maximum and gradually bring up the preamp level, but the Jazz Suprema is different. In fact, the first issue with that approach is that the background noise gets quite oppressive quite quickly when you turn the Master dial beyond 7-ish. The second issue is that it really isn't necessary, because pushing the output valves makes little difference to the character of the sound except for making it louder: this amp sounds great with preamp Volume at 6 and Master all the way down at 3.

And they're not joking about the 'clean' thing. Upping the preamp gain will enrich the tone with harmonic distortion, but you won't audibly scuzz the edges – at least with a relatively low-output pickup – unless you hammer it. This amp is all about warmth and clarity, with a sparkly top end to match its thumpy bottom, allowing a hollowbody's natural woodiness to shine through and responding eagerly to more aggressive pick attack.

The three EQ controls offer more than enough scope for fine-tuning your tone, especially when you include the pull-out options: the first acts a lot like the Bright switch on a blackface Fender Twin, while the second shifts the centre of the mid-frequency attenuation for a dramatic change of mood; it's thinner and more clanky, but will open up all sorts of expressive possibilities with the right guitar. The reverb is nice and lush, while Presence and Focus offer a much more subtle kind of control over the feel of the amp. The only slight disappointment here is that the Fat switch seems to roll off a sliver of treble rather than adding body, as the name might suggest.

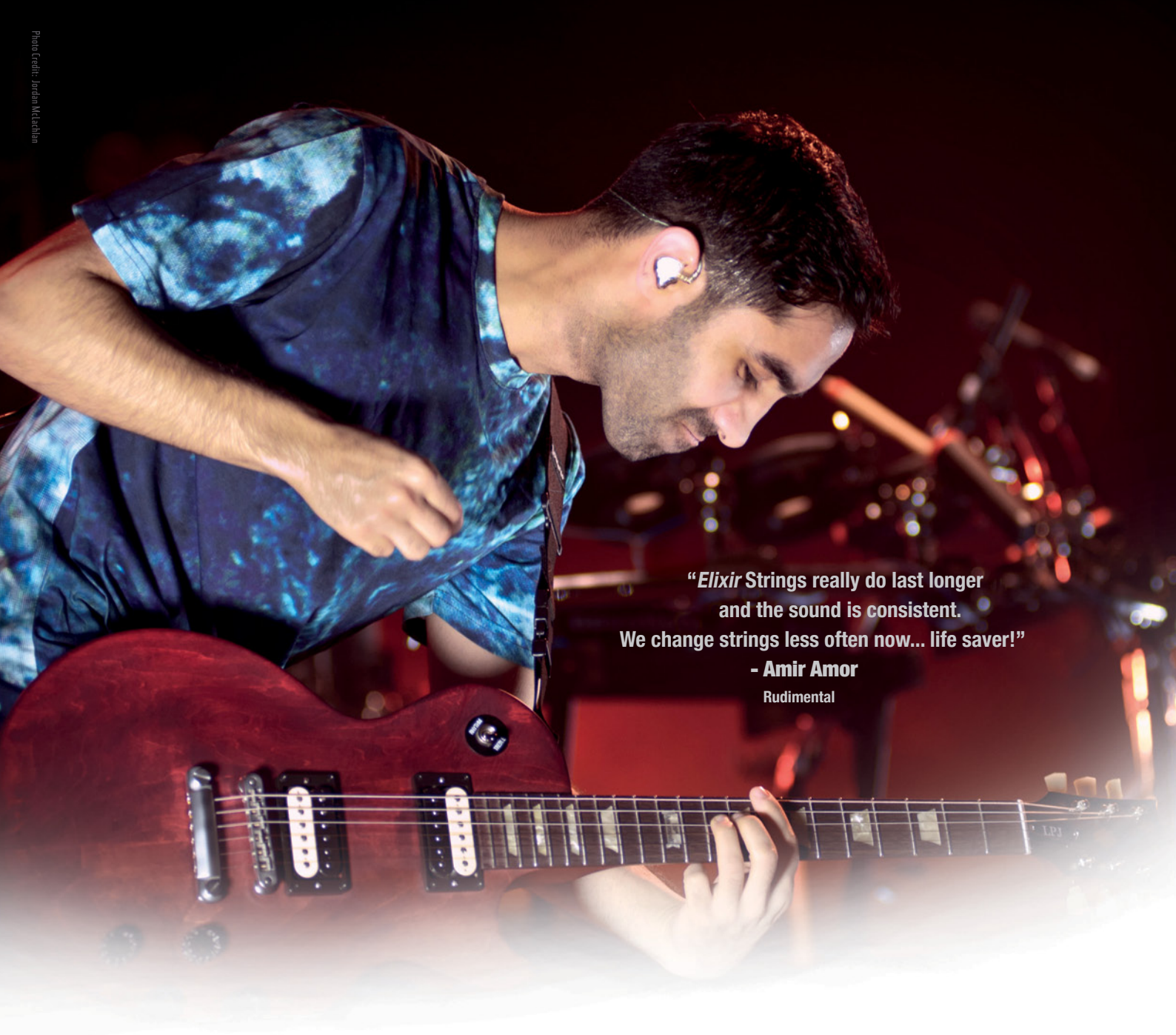
So, time to ditch that herbal cigarette, kick away the stool and see what happens when this amp meets an SG that hasn't had its dinner. First of all, as you might expect, all that headroom translates to a clean rhythm sound that can fill a room effortlessly and takes pedals very well – if you prefer to get your distortion from a box, the Jazz Suprema makes a beautiful blank canvas. But what you might not expect is just how good it can sound when it's really cooking: bluesy break-up on the neck pickup is one thing, but the smooth and solid overdrive available in the bridge position with everything cranked is pure EL34 joy. It's like everything after the first paragraph of this review never happened.

Verdict

Not a jazz guitarist? Shudder at the very thought of being asked to play a chord with numbers in it? Don't be afraid of this Rivera. It's just a really nice clean amp, and it's hard to imagine how anyone could turn it down for being 'too jazzy' – and while you won't get much overdrive out of it at practice levels, if you turn it up, it'll crunch like a steamroller in a biscuit factory.

FX loop is a useful feature for those who run time-based effects

FINAL SCORE	
RIVERA JAZZ SUPREMA 112	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Versatility	**17**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**87%**



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SEYMOUR DUNCAN

805 Overdrive, Dirty Deed Distortion & Pickup Booster

Seymour Duncan's chunky, purposeful new FX threesome aims to invade the gain side of your pedalboard. Review by **Richard Purvis**

Mr Duncan dipped his toe in the stompbox-making sea, and the water was good. So he skipped back to the beach-hut, changed into his stars-and-stripes bathing suit and leapt right in. Let's put it another way: the Pickup Booster was quite successful so the company did some more pedals. Then they did some more... and now, just to completely ruin that little beach analogy, they've dumped them all and started again. Well, not quite all. Acclaimed units like the Tweak Fuzz and the Twin Tube Classic are gone, but the original PB has been redesigned and is joined by three new effects, including the restrained overdrive and not-so-restrained distortion we've got here.

Duncan is, of course, the prince of pickups, so it's maybe understandable that these aren't the prettiest stompers – but given their tone-focused pedigree, the sounds should be a class above the looks. The wording on the bottom of the new enclosures is 'Assembled in Santa Barbara' – suggesting the components are fabricated in the Far East before the pedals are put together in Duncan's California factory.

805 Overdrive

The press release makes no secret of the origins of this one – the beyond-legendary Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer – but the fact that it's turquoise rather than green, and called 805 rather than 808, suggests a slight shuffle away from the starting point. The IC chip is different; most TS wannabes head straight for the JRC4558 but this uses an MC33178, which is claimed to offer longer battery life as well as lower noise and 'superior sonic characteristics'.

You'll notice, if you look closely enough, a trio of titchy knobs poking out of the middle of the box: a three-band EQ section, to give much more versatility than a standard Screamer. Like all the new Duncan pedals, the 805 has a standard 9v adapter input and a snug battery compartment, and is wired for true bypass.

Sounds

With Drive all the way down, the 805 hots things up a tad but there's barely any grit – it could just about pass as a clean boost – and even up to 10 o'clock it distorts less than my old Maxon at zero, but by halfway you're getting some nice overdrive, smooth and sparkly with no loss of bottom; crank it much more and chords start to get pretty raucous, but single notes up the neck remain sweet and bluesy. ➔

FACTFILE

SEYMOUR DUNCAN PEDALS

805 OVERDRIVE

DESCRIPTION **Overdrive pedal. Assembled in USA**
PRICE **£159**
CONTROLS **Level, Drive; Bass, Middle, Treble**

DIRTY DEED

DESCRIPTION **Distortion pedal. Assembled in USA**
PRICE **£140**
CONTROLS **Level, Drive; Treble, Bass**

PICKUP BOOSTER

DESCRIPTION **Boost pedal. Assembled in USA**
PRICE **£110**
CONTROLS **Gain; three-way Resonant Peak switch**

CONTACT **Rosetti**
01376 550033
www.rosetti.co.uk
www.seymourduncan.com

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Ibanez
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Way Huge
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Nifty interpretation of the Tube Screamer sound with a couple of useful mini-knobs for extra tone-sculpting
RRP **£105**

ZVex
Vexter Box Of Rock
Designed to sound like a Marshall JTM45 with 'everything on 10' – which says it all, really
RRP **£152**

Blackstone
Mosfet Overdrive 2S
Tiny two-channel unit from a highly respected boutique US maker, using four gain stages and 'screw' controls
RRP **$225**

Yerasov
Beige Bug
Transparent booster offering up to 30dB of hugeness, with handy treble and bass filters
RRP **£79**

DOD
Bifet Boost 410
A new cutey from the reborn DOD, with 20dB of boost, a tone control and a choice between true bypass and buffered bypass
RRP **£89**

The 805 expands on the classic TS template with extra EQ controls

Those mini-knobs are stiff and no fun at all to use, but they are centre-notched for what you might expect to be a bypass setting – in fact, to remove the familiar TS mids-hump and get close to an overdriven version of your guitar's original voice, you'll need to do some tweaking here. It always stays a little bit honky, but you don't buy a green overdrive pedal – or even a turquoise one – unless you want some of that.

Dirty Deed Distortion

A black stripe across a red box, with some cheesy gothic script, makes this the most un-handsome pedal in the range – but if the aim was mean and scary, well, nobody's going to mistake it for a Hello Kitty pencil case. The Dirty Deed uses a pair of mosfet transistors and includes mini-knobs for Treble and Bass; these can give up to 12dB of active boost or cut, but there's no obvious route to modern metal mid-scooping.

Sounds

Again the little tone knobs are centre-notched, and this time the sound with everything set halfway is every bit as ungodly as the look suggests. Actually, let's set the Drive to zero first and see how polite it gets... in fact it picks up close to where the 805 left off, with a richly crunchy sound that's clear, sweet and tonally an excellent match for the bypass signal. The really punky stuff starts to come in around 11 o'clock on the Drive, and it keeps getting crazier all the way up to full. It's big and fierce, but always well balanced. The EQ controls are great, adding or cutting as much top and bottom as you could ever need, and you can get just a little bit of scoop, sort of, by setting them both to maximum.

Pickup Booster

This is Duncan's new take on the pedal that first led him into the world of stompery. As before, the main focus of the unit is a central Gain control that's ready to give you up to 25dB of boost, and on the right there's a three-way 'Resonant Peak' switch for tonal tweakage: 0 is uncoloured, 1 is supposed to turn a single-coil into a vintage humbucker, and 2 adds even more heft. While there wasn't much wrong with the old PB, we're told the circuit has been improved; the most obvious difference, beyond the change from a curvy-cornered red box to a brick-shaped brown one, is that the boost now goes all the way down to zero instead of starting at 6dB.

Sounds

Plugging into a just-about-clean valve amp and beginning on the '0' setting, the Pickup Booster provides everything from a subtle step up in volume to a cow-toppling whoosh of gain. It does exactly what it claims to do – and you won't want this thing turned up to full blast unless you're intending to empty the street. The increased range makes direct A/B testing against an original PB a little more complicated than simply matching up the knob positions, but there doesn't seem to be any difference in performance at roughly equivalent boost levels.

The same goes for the other two positions, where the treble is subdued and the emphasis is on chunky mids: both offer very musical tone-shaping, and are ideal for moving from light chords to a meaty solo. Position 2 is a lot more dramatic than 1 but you're likely to find a use for both, no matter what kind of pickups you're using.

Verdict

These are ungainly chunks of pedal and they have to hold their own against a whole crowd of swishly-styled rivals, many of them from companies who have been in the game for decades, so Duncan's reputation as a pickup maker is not going to help them much. Fortunately, they're good enough not to need help – especially the 805, which will go up confidently against any sub-£200 overdrive in green, turquoise or dusky magnolia.

FINAL SCORE

805 OVERDRIVE	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**19**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

FINAL SCORE

DIRTY DEED DISTORTION	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**86%**

FINAL SCORE

PICKUP BOOSTER	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**86%**

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TANGLEWOOD
TPE SF DLX

If mahogany is a good thing, then surely flamed mahogany is even better – and this folk-sized Tanglewood adds a pickup and a cutaway, too. Review by **Rick Batey**

FACTFILE
TANGLEWOOD TW45 EG E

DESCRIPTION **Mini jumbo-sized electro-acoustic. Made in Korea**
PRICE **£599.95**

BUILD **Solid spruce top with laminated flamed mahogany back and sides, ABS binding, mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard, sealed tuners, Fishman Sonitone pickup system with INK 3 preamp**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Gloss all over**

SCALE LENGTH
650mm/25.6"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53.5mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20.5mm
Ninth fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.6mm
12th fret bass 2.8mm
WEIGHT **1.86kg/4.1lbs**

CONTACT **Tanglewood**
01937 841142
tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

This month we're parachuting in on the 'Premier' section of Tanglewood's vast and somewhat tangled catalogue. The Premier guitars – and there are eight other categories besides that one – basically break down into four sub-sections: plain Premier (nine models, all in spruce and laminated mahogany with satin finishes); Historic (four of '"em, all echoing Martin's 15 series with solid mahogany tops, laminated mahogany back and sides and satin finishes); Premier SE (six models, upgraded with solid Engelmann spruce tops plus a variety of exotic laminated backs and sides, but still with a satin finish); and finally Premier DLX... just two guitars, a cutaway dreadnought and the Super Folk we have for review this month, with solid Engelmann spruce tops, laminated flamed mahogany back and sides, and gloss finishes. All clear? That's good.

The Super Folk is Tanglewood's pitch at a comfortable, do-it-all design: it's compact, even more so than a 14-fret 000, and it has a cutaway, plus a pickup; everything you need, on the face of it, for writing, recording and plugging in at the local open mic session, or beyond. Flip this model over and you're confronted by an absolute sea of flamed figuring but, as we've said, this isn't maple, the most commonly-seen source of such extreme curl in guitarland, but rather a flamed variant of mahogany (or, at least, the outermost layer of the laminate is flamed mahogany). The colour is unusual and rather attractive; bare mahogany generally has a pinkish light brown colour but here the back, sides and neck have all been stained a slightly grey or olive hue that recalls certain kinds of 'oak' stain you can buy in hardware stores. It's a very different look to the rich red or dark brown usually applied over mahogany, and it does stand out from the crowd.

The Engelmann spruce top is nicely grained with just a touch of bearclaw here and there; Engelmann has a reputation of sounding sweet and open, particularly suiting fingerpickers as opposed to thick-plectrum blasters, so we'll see how that works out. The soundhole ring is a single band of abalone, and the binding (front ➔

Second strap button comes ready-fitted

Sealed tuners and a carved neck volute

The all-gloss TPE SF DLX has flamed mahogany laminate back and sides plus a nicely-grained Engelmann spruce top

Like this? Try this...

Crafter
GAE-15
Slightly Taylor-esque satin-finished mid-sized cutaway electro with laminated Dao back and sides, a solid cedar top and an LR Baggs pickup
RRP **£469**

Dean
Performer Plus
With a solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides, this all-gloss cutaway mini jumbo has a 3-band EQ preamp with built-in tuner
RRP **£339**

Aria
FET-Elite
This cutaway mini-folk comes with an undersaddle pickup and an AEQ-4 preamp. Back and sides are mahogany; the top is laminated too, but it's correspondingly affordable
RRP **£209**

Cream binding and an abalone rosette

Rosewood bridge with a compensated plastic saddle

Rosewood head facing with pearl logo

and back of body plus the sides of the fingerboard) is ivory-coloured ABS. The curvy bridge is rosewood, with black plastic pins and a saddle of PPS (polyphenylene sulfide, Google reveals).

The neck feels as slim and as sweet as most Tanglewoods, and the square, Collings-esque headstock features a dart volute and sealed chrome tuners. The board is rosewood with tiny pearl dots, and though the fretwork is good, the nut is a touch tall. So is the 12th fret action of 2.2mm on the top E and 2.9mm on the bottom, but there's plenty of saddle for that to come down.

The pickup is the familiar Fishman Sonitone undersaddle unit, but the control panel is a bit new. This is the Fishman INK 3, and though it has regular features – volume, centre-detented bass, middle, treble, and an onboard push-button tuner – the controls aren't sliders, nor normal knobs, but flush-mounted circles with tiny plastic protrusions which you control with a single finger. The best term we can up with is 'twiddle discs'.

The INK 3 preamp's low-profile and unobtrusive disc controls are designed for single-finger operation

They are low-profile and unobtrusive but, if you're used to a system that requires finger'n'thumb operation, these controls may take a bit of getting used to before you're able to fine-tune with confidence in the heat of battle.

The jack/battery system is also unusual: there's a flexible flap which pivots around the strap button, and when pushed sideways it reveals the PP3 battery, with a clip release system. Opportunity here for sympathetic buzzes, you may think, but there's no evidence of any during the course of this review process.

Sound

With a thick pick, single-note lines sound very reasonable, despite a slight pinginess on the top E that could be eradicated. As you move down the strings and the move on to play full chords it becomes obvious that this isn't a guitar for those who like their Super Folks to possess any kind of boom. But it's worth checking out if you're looking for lightness in your sonics, as even relative to its small size the tones delivered are on the distinctly airy side. With the solid wood top there's a fair chance the sound will develop as it ages, and if you like it now, you should warm to it even more as the years roll by...

New Fishman preamp has a 90 hour battery life

Verdict

On the good side, the TPE SF DLX is a neatly-designed little guitar with a handsome look, plus a good Engelmann top, and with a set-up it should play very nicely. The ergonomics of the INK 3 preamp won't be to everyone's tastes, but it does offer improved functionality over the vol/tone soundhole wheels commonly partnered with Fishman's Sonitone pickup. As stated in the *Sounds* section, this model's particular tonal characteristics won't be for everyone. But it's well worth giving it a spin to see if it works for you. If it does, it might well be a partnership that goes the distance.

FINAL SCORE

TANGLEWOOD TPE SF DLX	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**15**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**81%**

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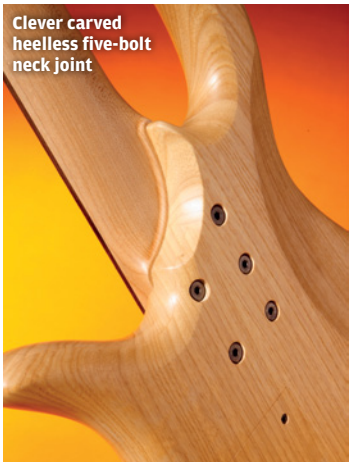
ELRICK
E-volution Gold 4 Bass

All the way from Chicago, a hand-hewn active four-string bass for those looking for that extra dollop of quality. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

In modern times, basses that we describe as 'boutique' or 'handbuilt' often involve some sort of standardised machining to complete certain elements of the process. That guarantees the same high-quality results each time, and this is after all an age of standardisation and homogenisation, where all the apples on sale in your local supermarket are virtually the same shape and size. However, anybody lucky enough to have an apple tree in their back garden will know that perfectly matching shop-bought fruit usually tastes bland, and that the naturally varied ones taste fantastic. This month's review subject is a totally handmade instrument, the equivalent, perhaps, of an apple growing 10 feet from your back door: an Elrick E-volution Gold four-string bass.

Based in Chicago, USA, luthier Robert Elrick has been building basses with his small team since 1993, and when you learn that each neck is hand-carved, you begin to understand why you'll pay from upwards of £2000 for one (there's also a put-together-in-Eastern-Europe Expat series, which start at £1500).

The EG4 is one of those basses which causes a sharp intake of breath when you extract it from its case; there's some hyper-microscopic attention to detail on show here. The natural finish is classy, and the sumptuous, 8mm-thick, two-piece quilted maple top has some gorgeous patterning. Most of the body mass is comprised of lightweight swamp ash, the top half being a single 30mm-thick chunk, the bottom half comprising two layers, about two thirds of the top section being removable via six Phillips screws – you'll have to do this in order to change the active electronics-powering 9v battery.



Clever carved heelless five-bolt neck joint

Three-piece maple neck plus headstock wings

Luthier Robert Elrick has been building basses with his small team since 1993, and each neck is hand-carved

The body shape is based around an offset lower bout, and there's no forearm chamfer on top, though there is a generous ribcage cutaway at the rear. The waist section is a little closer to the neck than is traditional, and the upper horn is thin, elongated and almost banana-shaped, extending right out to the 12th fret for balance, while the lower downwards-dipping horn exposes the fingerboard right back to the 24th fret. The neck joint is completely heel-less, and there's only a marginal change to the way the E-volution feels to play in lower and higher registers.

The three-piece maple neck extends a further 43mm into the body, butting up to the pickup. It's secured in place by five countersunk Allen bolts, and its shallow 'C' contour ensures good playability but with a degree of reassuring substance. We tend to think 'thinner is better' with necks, but there's a balance to be reached between being able to whizz around and it actually meaning something when you get there. This one feels as if it's lending some degree of support to what your hand is trying to do.

The headstock has a couple of wingettes glued on to achieve the ➔

FACTFILE
Elrick E-volution Gold 4 Bass

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in the USA**
PRICE **£2650 with deluxe soft case**

BUILD **Swamp ash body with quilted maple top, bolt-on maple neck, 24 medium frets on a wenge fingerboard. Hipshot Ultralite tuners and custom Elrick bridge. Gold hardware**

ELECTRICS **Active with Bartolini NTMBF preamp, two Bartolini J coil pickups, Volume, Balance, Bass, Middle and treble controls, active/passive and mid frequency switches**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Huge variety of natural-finished tops**
RANGE OPTIONS **E-volution Gold five-string from £2100 and six-string from £2200. E-volution Platinum four-string from £2500, five-string from £2600, six-string from £2700**

SCALE LENGTH
864mm/34"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 41mm
12th fret 55mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 22mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 11mm
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT
3.64kg/8lbs

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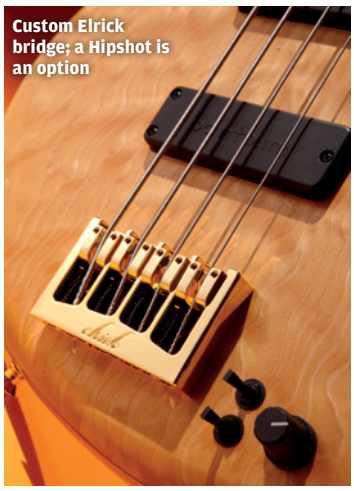
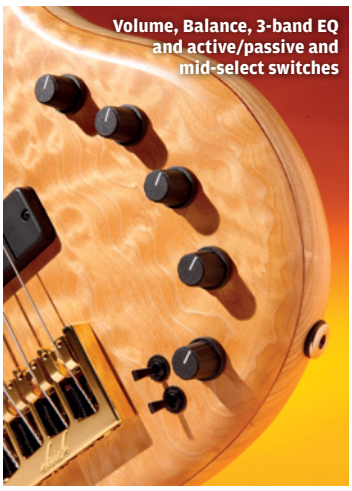

Custom Elrick bridge; a Hipshot is an option

Hipshot Ultralites with optional D-tuner lever


Volume, Balance, 3-band EQ and active/passive and mid-select switches

The E-volution starts to really justify its existence when you get the active EQ involved, especially the Bass dial

chosen cartoon-oblong form. It's faced in quilted maple and carries a cool 'E' logo and four Hipshot Ultralite tuners with a gold finish (our review model also has the optional D-tuner on the E peg). There are 24 medium nickel frets, plus a zero fret sitting just forwards of the white composite nut, while the fingerboard is dark and well-grained wenge, a product of the millettia laurentii tree from Central and West Africa. The frets are generally expertly seated, but there's a hint of protruding edge in the highest registers, although this doesn't have any negative effect on the playability. White dot markers on the fretboard are offset towards the bass side up to the standard duo at the 12th fret and to the treble side thereafter. Hipshot bridges are standard on the EG but here we have a gold Custom Elrick model.

An Bartolini NTMBF preamp is hooked up to a pair of Bartolini J coil pickups, the controls being Volume, Balance and a three-band EQ. Of the two small black switches, the rear toggles active/passive mode and the other sets the mid frequency for boosting/cutting at either 250, 500 or 800Hz. Finally, seated balance is decent and exemplary when strapped on, and the weight is very meagre at just 3.64kg/8lbs.

Extended neck joint and a wenge fingerboard

Sounds

The Elrick sounds very reasonable in twin pickup mode, with low strings that growl and have a focused impact, and there's also good clarity to be found through the midrange. However, while that clarity works well in the upper registers and thinner strings are snappy without brittleness, there is a slight adenoidal zing to the edge of the note. Some will love this modernity, but others may find themselves pining for a more natural and even response.

Things get better when you solo the neck pickup, with thumpy lows and an organic, woody response those of a bluesy or retro rock persuasion will love. It's not lacking definition, though, and this holds true as you move across the neck; the mids are still punchy but darker and the slight zingy sheen is minimised, aiding clarity. Moving to the bridge pickup alone, there isn't any excessive nasal bias; it's snappy and gurgly but not to excess, and the lows growl with a pleasing throatiness.

So far, so good, but the E-volution starts to really justify its existence when you get the EQ involved, especially the Bass dial. There's lots of power on offer, including a huge twin-pickup tone with a softer edge and more rock'n'roll versatility, a space-filling neck pickup sound with a raspy enhanced 'acoustic' quality, and lots of snappy definition at the bridge for a big, fat finger-funk sound. Boosting the Treble knob gets you clarity and extra spikiness on the bridge pickup, but the twin-pickup sounds becomes more nasal the more you dial in. Boosting mids at 250Hz (switch up) adds stature to the tone, plus a pleasing throatiness at the bridge and earthy aggression at the neck. Selecting 500Hz (middle) releases the Elrick's funky inner burp, vastly improving the twin-pickup sound. Boosting 800Hz leaves the twin-pickup tone still a touch too zingy, but it gives the bridge pickup a tight wiriness and unleashes a snarling animal of a tone at the neck.

Verdict

The Elrick E-volution Gold is an original-looking bass, lightweight, with a great-feeling neck, built to an extremely high standard and displaying enormous care and attention to detail throughout. The EQ offers a wide spectrum of superb sounds, and some of the solo neck and bridge pickup sounds are especially good. It's worth serious consideration if you're looking to invest in a dream bass.

FINAL SCORE

ELRICK E-VOLUTION GOLD 4 BASS	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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ALPHONSO JOHNSON

Photo by Karen Johnson

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MXR Bass Preamp

Solve your tonal problems by jamming this neat and well-equipped preamp into the front end of your amp. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Many bass players buy some FX pedals – probably distortion and chorus, and maybe an envelope filter – line them up on the floor (or chuck them on a board if they're really lucky) and expect to hear a fresh, new, version of our ideal bass sound without any degradation of the most important tonal elements or any diminution in level. Sadly, many of us end up disappointed. Most don't realise that there's a solution available, but there is. Such 'tone medicine' pedals come in two forms, boosters and preamps, and those clever MXR people have just added another option to the pantheon of preamps with their brand new Bass Preamp.

Measuring 63mm wide, 110mm deep and 52mm high (including rubber feet and switches), the BP is a small metal stompbox in dark green livery, weighing virtually nothing. As always with MXR kit, the layout is neat and tidy and the explanatory stencilling easy to read, but if you're not going to run it from a 9v power supply you have to go through the rigmarole of removing four screws to release the back panel and the 9v battery within. While you're there, however, you should locate the SW4 and SW5 internal switches and set them to 'Off' to achieve true bypass.

The array of controls is somewhat dizzying, but it's well-organised. The bottom line deals in EQ, which looks pretty pokey and comprises Bass (+/-16dB @40Hz), Mid (+/- 17dB from 250Hz to 1kHz) and Treble (+/- 18dB @ 4kHz), while the top line of controls number Output and Input (pre-EQ gain) controls, with the Mid Frequency dial corresponding to the Mid control immediately below it (+/-17dB from 250Hz – 1kHz). By the way, as well as output/input jack sockets, there's an XLR Direct Out with affiliated Ground/ Lift and Pre/Post EQ switches between the line of pedals.

Sounds

The Bass Preamp comes equipped to correct just about any tone and level troubles. Using Output and Gain for more volume works without altering your basic tone, even on extreme settings, although your amp's gain needs to be sympathetically set relative to these endeavours. The EQ section is equally good and although the dB numbers look big, sensibly attenuated. Boosting the Bass EQ (rotate clockwise from centre position) fattens and thickens without inducing excessive levels of rumble. Cutting treble is useful if you're suffering from an over-excitable horn, and boosting the highs induces a bright sheen with bags of extra cut and bite, although it gets a bit wiry past halfway. There's a spectrum of midrange frequencies available for surgery. From the left side of the dial there's darker, punchier sounds on tap, plus extra impact and stature. Near the 800Hz mark, with about two-thirds boost and similar Bass level, there's a wickedly burpy tone that's amazingly got almost too much bottom end for delivering da funk.

Verdict

MXR's Bass Preamp is a fairly awesome little piece of kit. It's very easy to use, with a very musical EQ that allows you to fix any tonal wobbles without fuss and also to dial in pretty much any type of sound you need. For those with multiple FX pedals, this sort of thing is a must-have. The price of £142 undercuts boutique offerings, and such is the quality of what's on offer that the MXR easily justifies the money.

FINAL SCORE

MXR BASS PREAMP	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Usability	**19**/20
Sound	**20**/20
Value for money	**19**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**93%**

FACTFILE

MXR Bass Preamp

SPECS **Dedicated bass guitar preamp pedal. Made in USA**
RRP **£142.99**

CONTROLS **Output, Mid Freq, Input, Bass, Mid and Treble controls, Ground Lift and Pre/Post switches. True bypass, battery or 9V p/s (not included) operation**

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HOOKED ON CLASSICS

REASON BE DAMNED

Some acquire guitars because of tonal needs, others seek the best examples of a brand, or weirdness, colours, famous artist appeal or a thousand other things. **Phil Harris** has no idea what drives him, but he knows it's incurable...

My colleagues at *Guitar & Bass Magazine* have asked me plenty of times over the years to talk about various themes; whether it be a certain type of model, or instruments from a certain period, and so on.

But sometimes you just have to admit that there's no overall philosophy to your collection, other than you just wanted that guitar at that particular moment. For a start, you're talking about musicians here, and we're as logical as a box of spanners, so you're on the back foot from the start trying to explain it all. Secondly, a collector's reasons for collecting can change like the weather; you can start off wanting the whole set of a particular model or colour, but after a while you just get a bit bored and your eye turns to something wacky. You seen that in the *Private Collection* features in this magazine; someone will have eight Stratocasters and whatever, and in amongst them is a Coral Sitar.

Alternatively, your financial circumstances change over the course of your life, and that can change your horizons. Going back to the *Private Collection articles*, someone will have some nice, but affordable examples of their favourite guitar, and then they've got a couple of instruments that are worth much more, because they were available in the aftermath of some kind of windfall. And plenty of collectors, myself included, will be mourning things that used to be in their collection but had to be sold to pay the bills.

In order to truly establish some kind of logic, you'd have to get inside the mind of each individual collector. For some, it's quality over quantity: for example, they want to own as much of a particular make as possible, even if it isn't that expensive or highly sought-after. For others, it's all about price and prestige, and if the machineheads aren't worth a million pounds each, they simply aren't interested.

For me, as for plenty of others, nostalgia can be a huge driving force; the desire to own all the gear that you had (or wanted to have) as a youngster can lead you to purchasing things that you'd never even contemplate from an investment point of view.

Another reason that's driven me to buy guitars that aren't to my personal taste are finishes. I've bought more than one instrument in foam green, even though I wouldn't be seen dead playing one.

I'd like to say I've learned my lesson, but the problem with having the collecting bug is that it's something that can attack at any time. You can wake up one morning and just be going about your business, and then all of a sudden a particular guitar you don't own can come into your mind, and before you know it you're ringing shops and scouring eBay to get hold of one. I've been trying to cut down my collection for some time now, as I recognise that I'm not an Egyptian Pharaoh who's going to have his slaves build them a pyramid in south London and then lock them in their with me and my guitars when I die to attend and maintain the glory of my collection.

However, if I let my guard down, I can find a new addition to the family. Recently I sold a Hofner President I'd had for a long time, and shortly afterwards I used that money to buy an old Hofner Committee. Now if you'd asked me the day before whether I was going to buy anything, I would have told you not to be silly!

I've come across some wonderfully strange people in my time, but I'm long past judging anyone for the reasons why they want to purchase something. After all, I'm the man that bought a Hagstrom P45, a truly rubbish guitar, just because it looked cool on the cover of an old Roxy Music album...

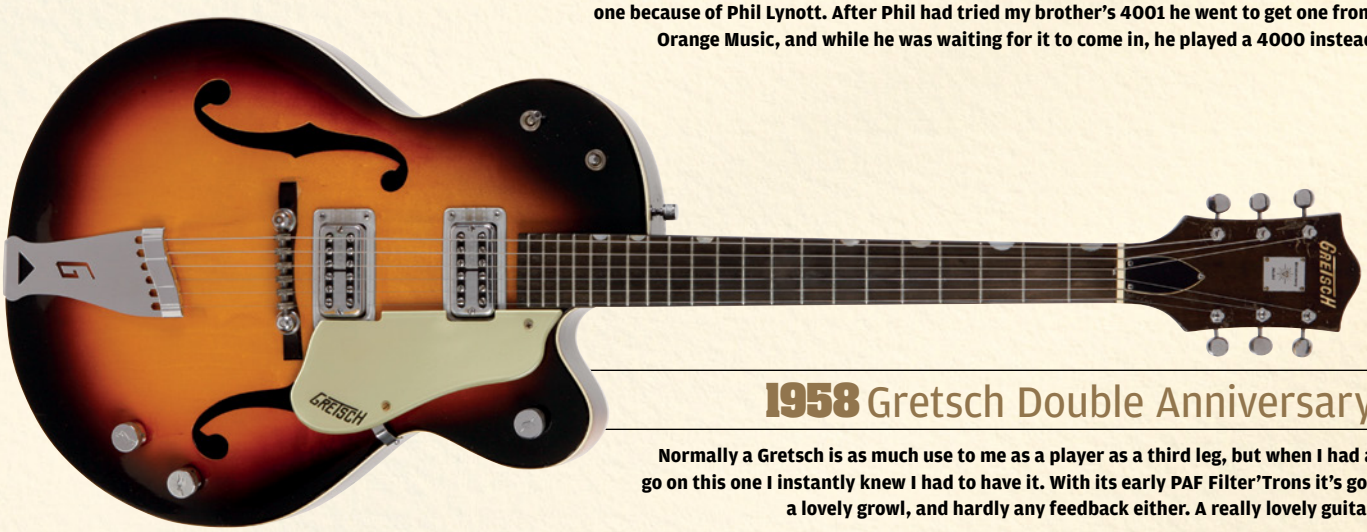
'You're talking about musicians here, and we're as logical as a box of spanners. A collector's reasons for collecting can change like the weather'

1961 Fender Precision

The original owner of this great Fender Precision bass played in the orchestras of all the London West End shows. He carried it around with no case, and stuck bits of corduroy to it so he wasn't cold down in the pit during those winter nights

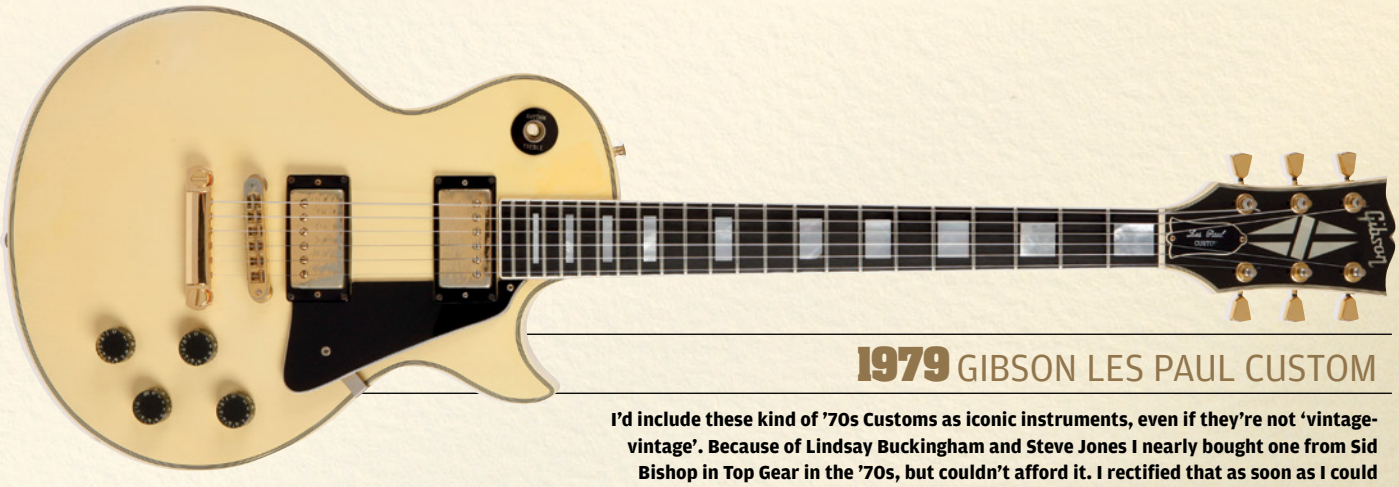
1973 Rickenbacker 4000

Everyone's mad for the Rickenbacker 4001, but they forget its little brother. I bought this one because of Phil Lynott. After Phil had tried my brother's 4001 he went to get one from Orange Music, and while he was waiting for it to come in, he played a 4000 instead



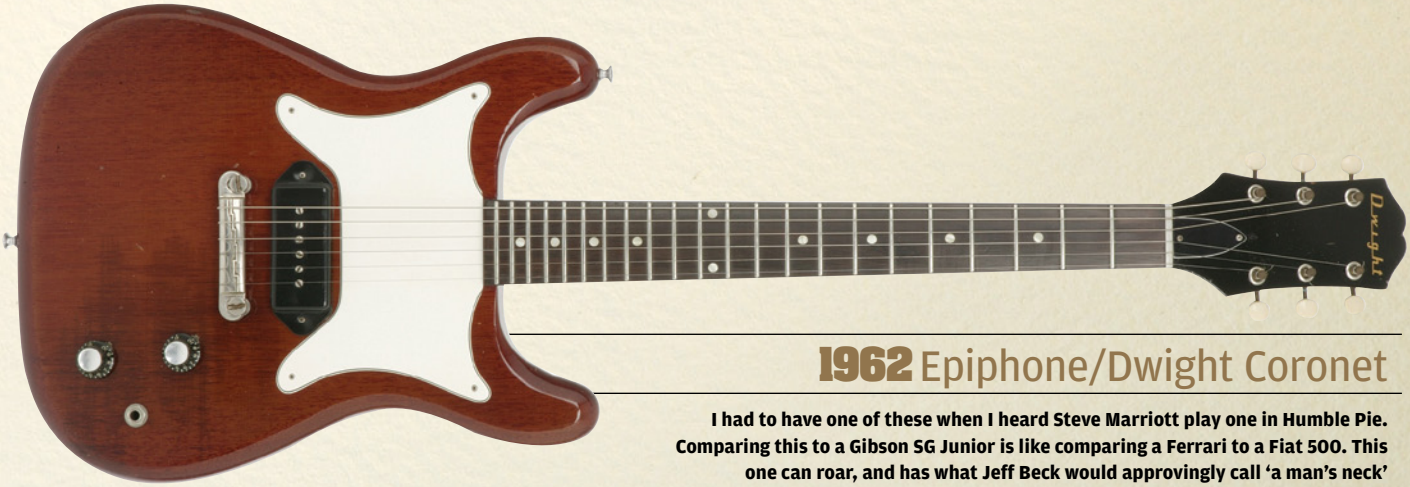
1958 Gretsch Double Anniversary

Normally a Gretsch is as much use to me as a player as a third leg, but when I had a go on this one I instantly knew I had to have it. With its early PAF Filter'Trons it's got a lovely growl, and hardly any feedback either. A really lovely guitar



1979 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM

I'd include these kind of '70s Customs as iconic instruments, even if they're not 'vintage-vintage'. Because of Lindsay Buckingham and Steve Jones I nearly bought one from Sid Bishop in Top Gear in the '70s, but couldn't afford it. I rectified that as soon as I could



1962 Epiphone/Dwight Coronet

I had to have one of these when I heard Steve Marriott play one in Humble Pie. Comparing this to a Gibson SG Junior is like comparing a Ferrari to a Fiat 500. This one can roar, and has what Jeff Beck would approvingly call 'a man's neck'

Rockin' THE HOUSE

David Morris has an abiding passion for quality rock instruments of the '80s, with an impressive sideline in unique, ex-name guitars. Oh... and he's also the MP for Morecambe & Lunesdale, with an office in the Houses of Parliament. Interview by Lars Mullen

Your eyes do not deceive you: this is indeed the Palace of Westminster, home to the House of Commons and the House of Lords, emblem of parliamentary democracy and epicentre of political life in the UK. Yet today our parliament is looking positively funkadelic, because it's absolutely littered with guitars. All the same, it isn't the first time that Parliamentarians have seen a Fender Stratocaster, not by a long chalk. Perhaps we'd better ask David Morris to tell us all about it...

'I work as a Private Parliamentary secretary to the Secretary of State for Wales, Stephen Crabb,' explains David. 'Stephen is a pretty good guitarist, and we've threatened to put a band together on more than one occasion!

'We also get a lot of rock stars here in Parliament because the MP for Brighton, Mike Weatherley, set up a musical awareness program called Rock The House, which runs competitions for kids from all around the country to submit tapes and win guitars. Mike sometimes invites some top players along, people like Bernie Marsden and Yngwie Malmsteen, who are both patrons of Rock The House. I introduced Bernie to the Prime Minister, David Cameron, for all the charity work he's done over the years. The PM knew all the Whitesnake material... his favourite song, though, is Thin Lizzy's *Whisky In The Jar*! They say you should never meet your heroes, but I've been lucky... whilst being extremely talented, underneath they are just normal people in extraordinary jobs.

'I talked to Yngwie about the music business and he said that back in the '70s and '80s he used to read any article he could find about Ritchie Blackmore... well, that turned out to be me, too. It was such a surreal moment. I was in awe because I remember listening to his *Rising Force* album over and over, thinking that I might as well give up, as I'd never be able to play that fast!'

In fact David was blessed with an ear for tuning and phrasing from an early age. He was born in Leigh in Lancashire, and his ex-Royal Navy father became a director for maritime affairs in the Bahamas, so the family moved to Nassau Island in the '70s. This was where David fell in love with the sound of an electric guitar – but not from the effect of local music.

A '72 Epiphone 5102T, aka the EA250, and a Washburn Falcon

A pair of Dan Smith-era Fender Strats flank a Strat Deluxe

'In Nassau I could hear this guy practising in a house pretty close to us in the evenings,' David laughs. 'It was a surreal moment when I heard the same songs on the radio six months later – it turned out to be Peter Frampton! I was only about 10 years old at the time so I didn't really know much about him, but my brother, who was seven years older, used to hang around and try and get a glimpse of his idol.

'I met Peter several times and he taught me some basic open chords on an acoustic guitar, and from that day onward I started to pick it up by ear on a guitar that my father bought me. It just seemed really natural to me. I soon realised I was playing at the same level as guitarists a lot older than myself.

'By the time we went back to live in Lancashire I was pretty well accomplished and followed the usual trend of forming a band at school, and we were soon gigging in local clubs playing a variety of covers.

'I was always a Beatles fan and really wanted an Epiphone, and saw this semi-acoustic 5102T dating from '72. It obviously wasn't a Casino like John Lennon played, but I still fell in love with the look and the slim neck. They were overlooked at the time, but seem to be becoming collectable right now.'

A problem with short-sightedness prevented David from gaining entry to the Navy, but his progression on the guitar earned him a position as a songwriter. 'I later gigged with a very young Rick Astley and had some success as a writer,' he says. 'I also went down the road of being a hairdresser's apprentice, which I thought was cool as it was clean, and there were lots of girls around! I kept up the guitar work in the evenings and was successful in writing several popular songs during the '80s.

'The guitar I was using at the time was this early '80s Dan Smith Fender Stratocaster with a natural finish. This was the first decent guitar I ever owned. Smith was hired to revitalise Fender's quality control and to upgrade the basic production Strat. This model included several upgrades and changes, including a smaller pre-CBS shaped headstock, a four-bolt neck and an overwound X-1 bridge pickup. With an ash body, a maple fingerboard and the hot pickup, this guitar is pretty lively and easily cuts through a live mix.

'Mind you, for more warmth, I personally prefer a rosewood fingerboard – as on this hardtail model, also in natural ash but with a rosewood fingerboard. I bought this one as reminder of a similar fat-headstock Strat I had years ago, but I got rid of it because the truss rod was rattling in the neck and no one could sort it out. You have to remember, this was in the '70s when a lot of local guitar shops didn't have much idea of how to fix guitars!

'My Strat Deluxe arrived much later, in 1995. It's quite a high-end model with the Lace Sensor single coil pickups and a roller nut. I believe this was the model originally destined to be the Jeff Beck signature Strat, before his came out loaded with a humbucker at the bridge.

A Fender Blackmore signature Strat and a specially-signed Epiphone SG Custom

'I also have one of the first Japanese Ritchie Blackmore signature Strats, as I'd been a total fan of his playing from day one, especially during the Deep Purple and Rainbow periods. I learnt just about every guitar lick on those albums, so I really wanted one of these. It comes with a dummy pickup in the centre and a scalloped fretboard. It's a great player and just seems to come alive when I play his lead lines. He obviously had some input into the design.'

And what's the story with the signed Epiphone SG Custom? 'Well, on one occasion,Bernie Marsden was here with Slash and Miles Kennedy, so I got them both to sign this ↔

guitar,' David explains. 'I picked this one up in Cash Converters for £50... it sounds cheap, doesn't it, but you should have seen it – it was in a terrible condition and painted black. I could see the potential, so I went to work on it and sprayed it white. I can handle basic repairs and set-ups, but for any more than that I'll take the guitar from where they are kept in storage in London back up to Dave Wood at Promenade Music in Morecambe in Lancashire when I pay a visit to my home county.'

David tells us of a nail-biting experience as a young metal player. 'I enjoyed any off-shoot from that period, including Whitesnake. I was still only about 17 years old and handling as much session work that was thrown at me as I could, and when Bernie Marsden left Whitesnake, I went for the audition. This was around the *Saints & Sinners* album in the early '80s, and I'd learnt all the tracks in preparation. I heard that I had been shortlisted, but I was considered too young.

'I was also very much into Eddie Van Halen, so in '84 I bought myself a brand new black Kramer Focus 1000 from A1 Music in Manchester. It was a Japanese licensed model, and I still have it here in the collection... it paid for itself, as I used it for most of the session work around that period. Shred metal and hard rock guitar was the trend at the time, and one volume control, a loud humbucker, Floyd Rose system and a locking nut was all you needed.

'Even today, this is all I want when I play live. I got on with this guitar so well that I decided to save for the USA model that Eddie endorsed, but I tried it in a shop and just couldn't get on with the huge neck, so I stayed with the Focus 1000... I just think it's the better guitar. I added a custom humbucker with split coil facilities, a chrome control knob and a chrome pickup surround.

'Throughout the '80s the Kramer and the Strats were the only guitars I needed, really, and the session and live work were both going really well. Out of the blue one day I had a call asking if I would audition for a really big band that was looking for someone a little different. I thought I might as well be blown out again for being too young, but I went along to the offices in Soho which had all these gold records on the wall, and it turned out to be Duran Duran, who up until then had been one of the biggest bands in the world, but some members had split to take up solo projects! So once again, I was shortlisted and told I had the gig. I'm all geed up for a week, until I got a call saying they had decided to stick with Nile Rodgers and a session musician for the next tour... goodbye!

A Kramer Focus 1000, still one of David's mainstay guitars

A 10-string BC Rich, currently set up as a six-string

'After nearly getting the break I wanted so many times, I just felt I'd had enough, and I turned my back on the whole music industry. I started up a successful chain of hairdressing shops while also becoming passionate about politics. I saw this politician on the TV and I thought "I could do a much better job than that". I'd written a letter to the council about the bin collection and this guy came around saying he liked what I had written. I seemed to be drawn into this political world, and so I stood for the council. If anyone had told me 20 years ago this is where I'd be now, I'd have laughed my head off.'

David is particularly interested in guitars from the Far East built around the late '70s and early '80s – brands such as Aria, Yamaha, BC Rich and Ibanez. 'I think these guitars are so good because, at the time, they had a lot to prove against the big names, and so they went all out with the woods and the decoration,' he decides.

'Here's a rare one – a 10-string BC Rich. This is a very early one, hand built by Bernie Rico himself more or less as a prototype. In true BC Rich style the body shape is off the wall, with the two cutaways at the bottom where four extra machineheads reside. The electrics are insane! I once read somewhere that with array of rotary controls plus the switches for coil-tapping, active/passive, preamp settings, phase and a six-way rotary, it can produce 154 different sounds, and that's just scratching the surface!

'The next three are quite interesting; I call them the "lawsuit" three – an Epiphone, a Washburn and a Hohner, all of which probably caused quite a stir at PRS. By choice my favourite guitar must have a natural finish, and all these three show of the grain of their tops really beautifully.

'The Washburn 10RV on the left has a deep orange stained top. I bought it from a young guy called Dan Parr, who said it was his father's. Well, John Parr, who had a hit in the mid-'80s with *St Elmo's Fire*, endorsed this model and he lived in the same area, so I'm pretty sure it was one of his.

'The guitar in the middle is a USA-made Epiphone and it's extremely rare; very ➔

'I turned my back on the music industry, but if anyone had told me 20 years ago this is where I'd be now, I'd have laughed my head off'

REAL BANDS REAL AMPS

....."For Years I was really frustrated because my band is really loud, In order to compete at that volume with that much low end, all other amps would just fall apart. The Ashdown didn't. I can turn it up to compete with those guys and still have the tone stay together.
I know there are a lot of other bass amps out there but I found what I was looking for with Ashdown and have stuck with them for over 12 years".....

Nate Mendel - Foo Fighters
Ashdown - NM2 Pedal, BTA-400's and CL-810's

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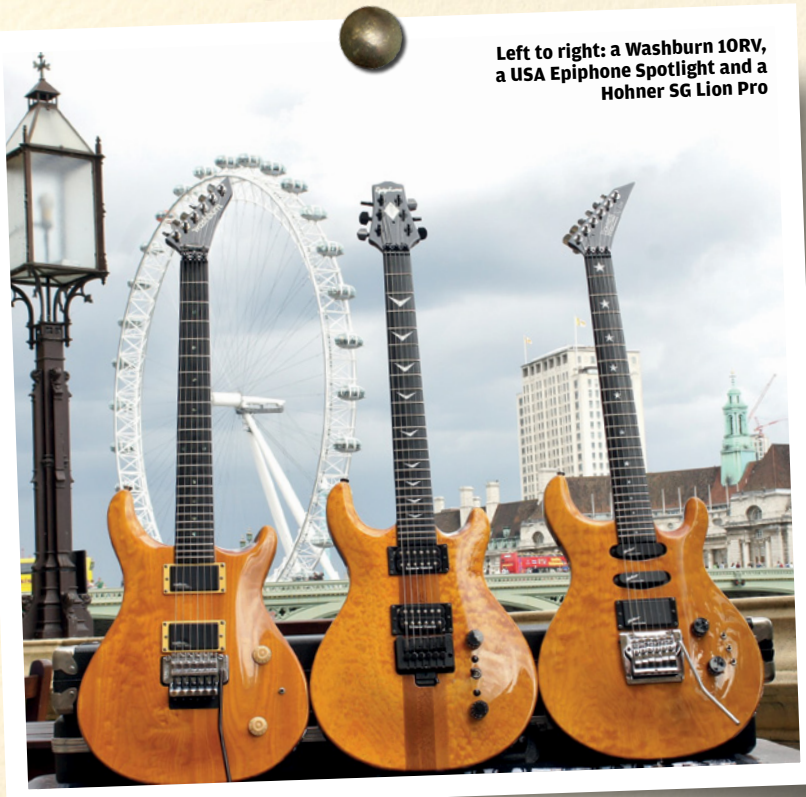

Left to right: a Washburn 10RV, a USA Epiphone Spotlight and a Hohner SG Lion Pro

Left, an ex-Alan Murphy Aria Pro II RS Esprit; right, an Aria Pro II Custom

few were made. This particular one was a prototype that appeared at a NAMM show in the USA. I love the chevron position markers, and you can see where they filled in two holes with hand-dowelled wood; those were destined for extra switches. The body is gorgeous, with a three-piece centre block and birdseye maple wings all offset with black hardware, including a Steinberger vibrato. The neck and fingerboard are carbon fibre. I only paid £100 for it, ages ago, in Denmark Street. At some point I'd like to change the Seymour Duncans back to what was on there originally, which I believe was EMGs. I'm told this was the modern version of Gibson's Les Paul Spotlight Special. It's quite heavy, and it's got tons of sustain.

'On the right is a Hohner SG Lion Pro. This was made as a production model, but again it was discontinued. I think the body is made from rubella, with a maple top. It has a set neck, EMG Select pickups and a Schaller vibrato system, and I like the star inlays on the fretboard. Like the others with hefty vibrato systems, a locking nut is essential.

'Here's a nice pair of Arias. This white Pro II RS Esprit used to belong to Alan Murphy, the guitarist in Go West during the '80s, and it's a pretty high-end model with a Floyd Rose copy vibrato and separate switches for active/passive, phase, and coil tapping. It's a great player, and the deep cutaway allows easy access all over the neck. When Yngwie Malmsteen came here I got him to sign the back, as he used to endorse this model when he was with Graham Bonnet in Alcatrazz.

'About five years ago I went to a house clearance sale looking for a wardrobe, and came out with this three-pickup Aria Pro II Custom! It had been living on top of a wardrobe for years, so it was very grubby... it looked as if pigeons had been using it as a nest for years. I've spent a couple of hundred pounds getting it back to a playable condition. It took me forever to clean it up, but it was worth the effort as it's a quality guitar, and all-mahogany too.

'The final Aria is another one made under the Pro II banner. I spotted it on eBay and spotted that it had a double octave neck with "Phil Palmer" inlaid at the 24th fret. Phil was one of the most sought-after session players in the late '70s and early '80s; he played with everyone from Bob Dylan to Tina Turner and Dire Straits, and he was the musical arranger for the Fender Strat 50th Anniversary gig.

'The through-neck construction and the stained body wings are very typical of Aria from this period – it's quite similar to the SB1000 bass, which was used by people like John Taylor of Duran Duran. This one has an offset body with dark red wings, a maple/walnut seven-piece through-neck, oval inlays, and a vast array of controls.'

Another Japanese brand that fascinates David is Ibanez. 'They've made some wonderful guitars over the years and they weren't afraid to experiment,' he says.

'They also had the help of some high-profile players, which can really make things interesting. Take Reb Beach, for example; Reb was in Winger and currently plays with Whitesnake. I found this early '90s Ibanez RBM signature model in a shed owned by a guy who had a wood yard. He sold guitars now and again, and I just bought this one on the spot. I read that Reb designed it on the back of a napkin on a flight during which he had too much to drink! Either way it's a really cool guitar, very '90s and metal-themed. It incorporates various designs from some of ↦

Aria Pro II RS-X70 from 1980 or 1981 with custom 'Phil Palmer' inlay

'The white Aria Pro II Esprit used to belong to Alan Murphy, while the other Pro II has "Phil Palmer" inlaid at the 24th fret'

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Left to right: an Ibanez RBM Reb Beach, the ex-Gary Kemp Ibanez Roadstar and an Ibanez RG550

'When I stood on the boost pedal the extra volume dislodged a shuttlecock that had been up in the rafters since the reign of Henry VIII'

his favourite guitars, like the lower cutaway for the Floyd Rose... that's rather akin to a Steinberger GNM model. The electrics are basic – one volume, a pickup selector and a coil tap switch – and yet it'll deliver all the right rock sounds. I met Reb at a Whitesnake gig in Manchester a couple of years ago, and he confirmed the Steinberger cutaway influence on this model.

'Gary Kemp of Spandau Ballet used to own this Ibanez RS Roadstar. About 100 of these were produced, but this one is a bit unique. It hasn't got a serial number, for a start. This model was only available in a sort of powder metallic white finish, but Gary had his sent back to the factory to be sprayed red. It's started to crack a little where the paint hasn't taken that well.

'I bought it from a shop in Denmark Street. The guy said I wouldn't want it when he told me who had owned it! Apparently, it was brought in by an actor friend of Gary's who had appeared on *The Bill*. I walked out the shop thinking "No way", but by the time I got halfway up Tottenham Court Road I had decided that the story was so bizarre it had to be true, so I went back and bought it.

'The last Ibanez is this RG550. It's got deep cutaways, battle-proof hardware and the humbucker-single coil-humbucker pickup formation. Only one rock band has ever played the Great Hall in Westminster – the MP Four, which was four of us MPs, including myself. We put on a show for the Queen's Jubilee in 2012 and I used this guitar. Bizarre, really, as this is a very historic place, and I'm on the step where they tried William Wallace in 1305, playing *Wishing Well*... how decadent is that! We didn't hold back; we were pretty loud, in fact. The heritage people were a little worried about the stained glass windows, and when I stood on a boost pedal for a lead break, the extra volume dislodged a shuttlecock that had been up in the rafters since the reign of Henry VIII. So I shook down a piece of 500-year old history with an Ibanez RG550. It makes a pretty good party story. I'll never ever forget it!'

A Washburn KC100 and a Yamaha Pacifica 1221

Our exploration of David's passion for Oriental guitars is not yet over; next on the list is one of his favourites, a Yamaha.

'Yamaha were always a big contender and their back catalogue is full of interesting models,' he comments. 'I've had this Pacifica 1221 for about 25 years now. The body is basswood, and the neck is the thinnest 24-fret neck I've ever seen. The pickups are USA DiMarzios, and the sheer mass of Yamaha's RM-PRO II licensed Floyd Rose certainly beefs up the sustain.

'I'm about to send this one back to Japan, though, as there's a slight problem with the neck joint. From what I can gather it has three carbon fibre rods instead of a truss rod, and these need looking at. I can't wait to get it back, as I love this guitar. I've gigged it many times, including out here on the Westminster terrace where we are today with my guitars, right under Big Ben.'

Next up is a bright red rocker from that ever-underrated company, Washburn. 'This first one is a KC100 from the Chicago Series,' David says. 'It's got deep body cutaways, a carved top and back, a through-neck, a double-octave fingerboard and USA Seymour Duncan pickups.

'I believe that Tom Anderson – who used to work with Suhr guitars – oversaw the making of these back in the late '80s, so this is basically a Suhr guitar with Washburn on the headstock. At the time, it was more expensive than a Les Paul. Robbie Robertson of the Band used to endorse this model, and it's a killer guitar in every department.

'I have two Washburn A-20s, both with set necks. The first one has a dark cherryburst finish over a figured maple top. I purchased it years ago from a singer-songwriter in the North of England called Chris Bannister. I think I really bought it because it was a reminder of the days when I was a kid, learning all those Whitesnake solos for the audition! They're good guitars, especially for metal, rock and blues.

'When Micky Moody was in Whitesnake during the late '70s and early '80s he had an endorsement deal with Washburn, and he had a special red A-20 built, identifiable by the "hat" inlay fingerboard position markers, and I'm thrilled to be able to say I now own it. Micky replaced the original pickups with cream Dimarzio humbuckers, which I think look great, and they sound amazing in this guitar.

'The A-20 has an ergonomic body shape which was based, in a way, on ↦

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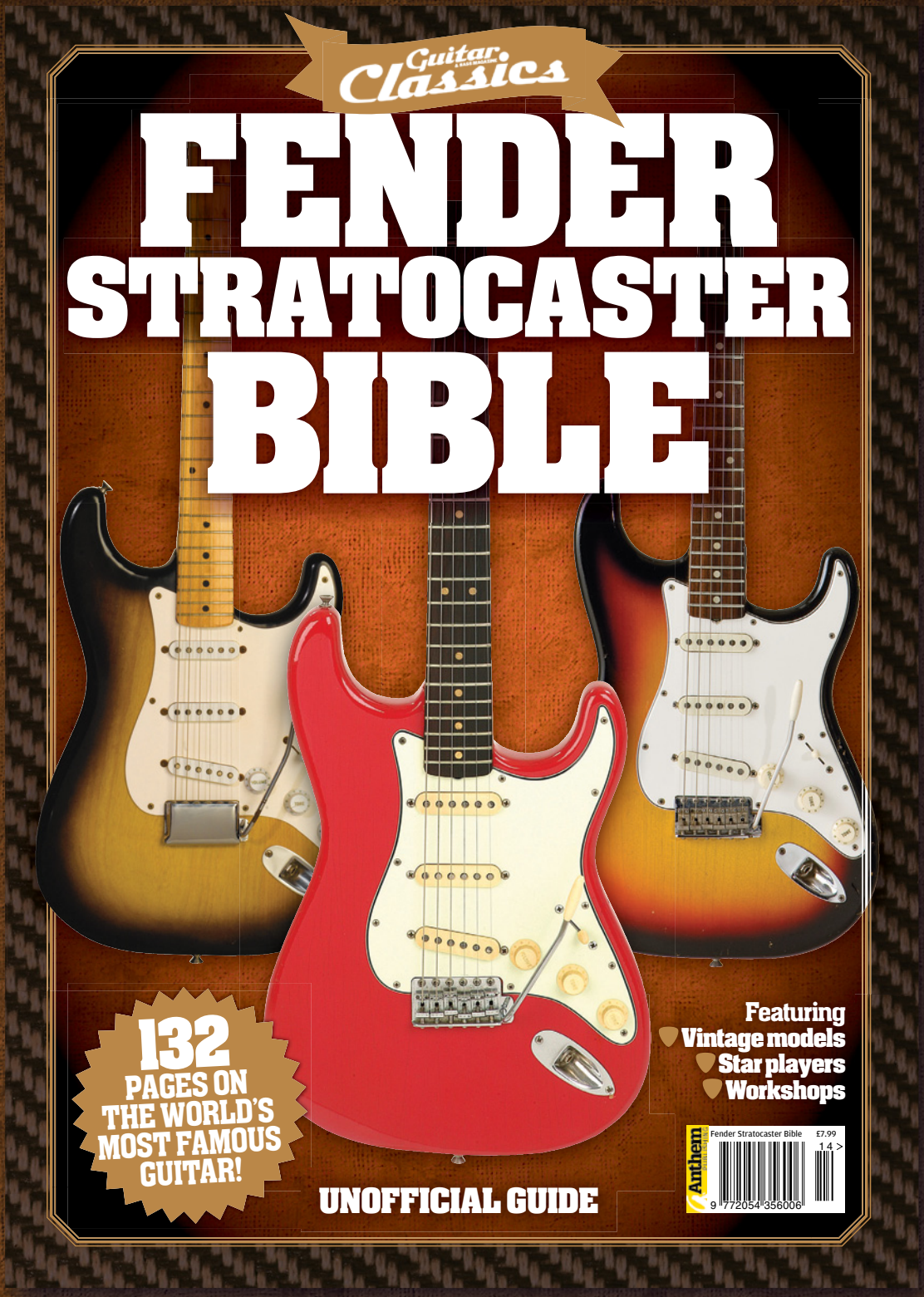

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that of a Gibson Explorer. The A-20 was the top of the line in the Stage Series, which also featured A-5, A-10 and A-15 models.'

David's final Washburn is pictured back on page 77, next to the semi-acoustic Epiphone. 'For years I had been looking for a Washburn Falcon, and I finally found this one in A1 Music in Manchester in 1999,' he says. 'It's from the company's Wing Series. I always loved the little horned cutaways, the walnut/maple body and the through-neck construction. Apparently I passed a guy in the doorway who had just that minute traded it in for a Strat! It was exactly what I was looking for. I remember getting it home and having to hide yet another guitar from my wife...

'Thinking back, I bought this '78 Gibson 25/50th Anniversary at a time when I really couldn't afford it, and I went into debt straight away. I decided if I wasn't going to eat well for a long time, then at least it should be over a decent Les Paul. I'd been in and out of Sounds Great in Cheadle near Manchester several times looking at it, knowing all the time it cost was far more than I could afford. When I finally decided to buy it, I was told some guy had put a deposit on it... but he didn't come back, so I took the plunge.

'I particularly liked the idea of the Kahler bridge; the previous owner apparently sent the guitar back to Gibson in the USA to have it fitted. This one used to belong to John Lees from Barclay James Harvest.'

Even in this company, David's pink reverse-headstock Peavey makes quite a statement. 'The Peavey Vandenberg is a real favourite,' he says. 'If you're the kind of person who likes to see flowing designs, all equal and level, then it'll give you a headache for sure... but to me, it's clever how the oddball design can create such an attractive looking guitar. It's got an ebony fingerboard and black hardware – one humbucker, one single coil and a Kahler vibrato. I particular like the "steps" cut into the edge of the headstock... they give it a real retro-rock look. This was a custom shop model, and very expensive when it came out in the late '80s.'

Micky Moody's A-20 has custom 'top hat' inlays

A pair of Washburn A-20s – a standard sunburst model and the red Micky Moody guitar

We've almost reached the end of our parliamentary tour, with one guitar to go – and one amp. 'This,' says David, 'is a mid-'80s Carvin V220. I've been threatening to buy this guitar ever since I saw it first go up on the wall at HW Audio in Bolton, all the way back in 2000. Guitarists from that area will know it's been for sale for that long... and I finally struck a deal earlier this year!

'Every Carvin guitar is handmade, and this model was originally endorsed by Craig Chaquico from Jefferson Starship. I haven't done any work on this one yet, but it's in really good condition, with no dings or scratches or buckle rash... although the strings are 15 years old now.

'Final mention must go to this battery-driven Pignose amp from the '70s. I bought this amp at a Beatles convention. It was looking all forlorn on a bookshelf marked "ex Howie Casey", who was a session saxophonist who worked with Paul McCartney on the *Wings Across America* album. I have a book about that album and the tour, and there's a picture of the late guitarist Jimmy McCulloch using one of these amps in the band. That amp must have been one of the first produced, and I've checked the serial number and this is also from the first run. I'm still wondering why a saxophonist would want one of these, so it's possible it's the very one used by Jimmy McCulloch.

'Scott Gorham was here a while ago and he said what a cool life I have. Well, I'm 48 and in a pretty good position in Parliament, but give up the guitar? There's no fear of that. And I still might get that call from David Coverdale!'

1978 Gibson 25/50 Anniversary Les Paul

Pink Peavey Vandenberg with stepped body and headstock

Carvin V220 and Pignose battery amp

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THE BISHOP OF DENMARK STREET

THE GUITARIST'S LIFE CYCLE

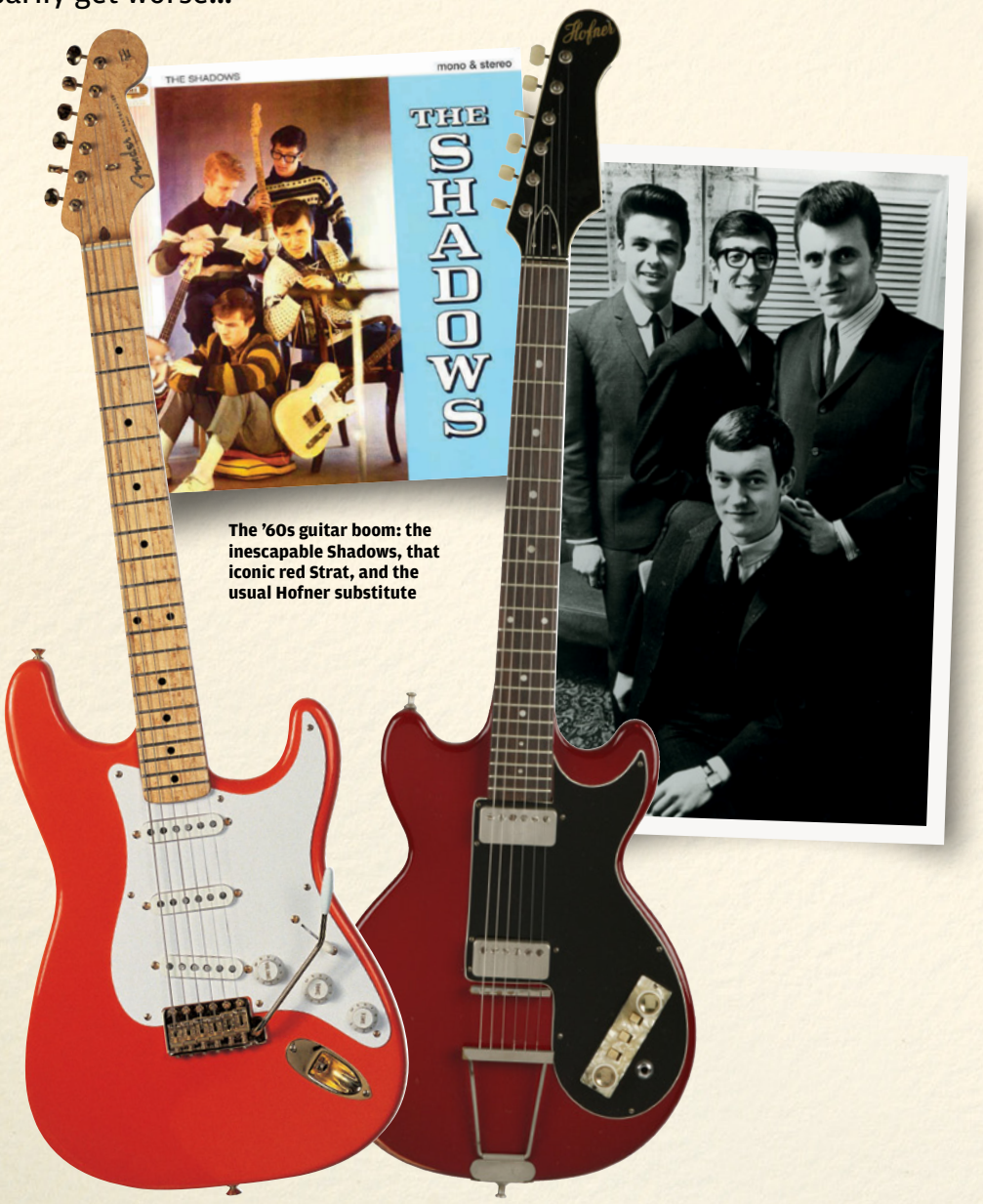
Try as you might, you cannot escape the Six Ages Of Twang... or is it seven? **Sid Bishop** looks at how we tend to approach music differently through the decades, and rest assured, things don't necessarily get worse...

The overwhelming majority of us – myself included – start playing during our teen years. There are several quite logical reasons for this, among which are, 1, it makes a lot of noise, 2, is almost guaranteed to irritate our parents and 3, is all wrapped up in the whole 'being a rebel' thing and provides an ideal excuse for growing your hair long. We are also reliably informed that it's a great way of attracting the opposite sex, and also satisfies the desire to 'fit in', be a part of something, a club if you will, one part of that club being the band that you eventually aspire to join.

The whole exercise is made more possible because we also have, for the first time in most cases, a little disposable income of our own. We can blow that on fun stuff without any qualms, as we are still living with our parents and can therefore rely on being housed, fed and clothed free of charge. That scenario represents, at that point in our existence, our lives as guitar players, and I would take the view that only a fairly small proportion of beginners ever forecast a lifelong career in the music industry. It was all just a bit of a lark.

At the time I was getting started it was all about Hank Marvin, and of those classic instrumental hits that many of my generation struggled to play. My first-ever public performance, given during the interval of my annual school play (of 1962), was comprised of stumbling renditions of Shadows favourites, with *Wipe Out* thrown in for good measure; it went down well, as I recall. Undoubtedly Hank was the poster boy of the day (though when it came to bedroom walls, even he would admit he was no substitute for James Dean).

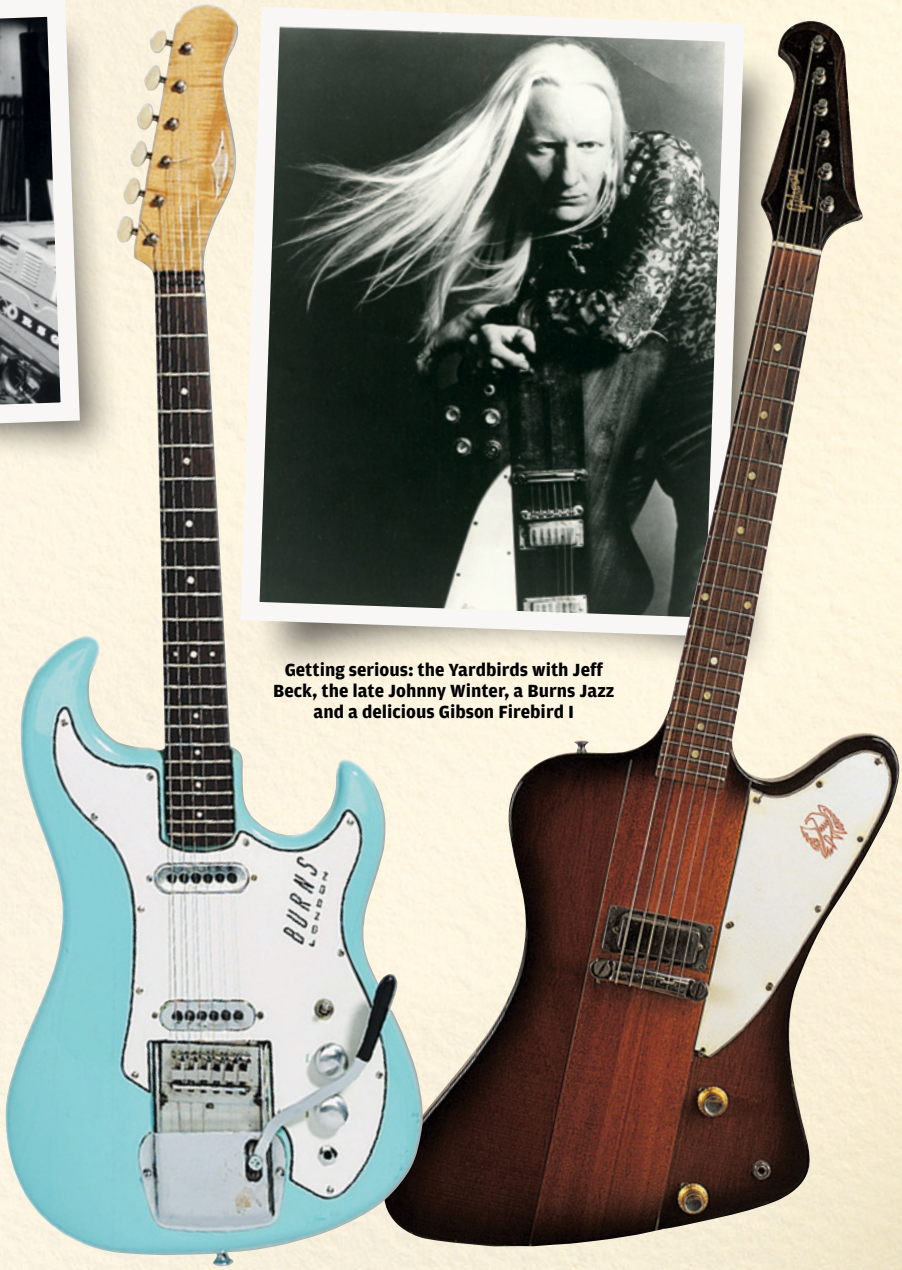
Hank Marvin also had a bright red guitar. I therefore had to have one too, though I couldn't possibly afford the Fender Stratocaster that he had, despite how much income I had to be disposed of. I finally



The '60s guitar boom: the inescapable Shadows, that iconic red Strat, and the usual Hofner substitute

I would take the view that only a small proportion of beginners ever forecast a lifelong career in the music industry. It was all just a bit of a lark

Photo: John Rodgers/Getty Images



Getting serious: the Yardbirds with Jeff Beck, the late Johnny Winter, a Burns Jazz and a delicious Gibson Firebird I

bought a Hofner Colorama. It was at least red, though any further similarity to a Strat was purely coincidental.

The years inexorably roll by. We are now out of our teens and have somehow made it into our twenties. We have met that special person and have a need to 'settle down'. This means deserting mum and dad (much to the relief of all concerned), getting married, moving to our own place, getting a mortgage, possibly having kids, blah blah.

As far as our guitar playing is concerned we are faced with an unpleasant and unavoidable choice. Assuming we haven't been fortunate enough to have landed up in a chart-topping band earning serious money, which of course 99.9 per cent of us haven't, we are forced into getting a 'proper' job, something that our dads had been nagging at us to do for several years. It turns out he might have been right after all. Playing in the average pub, club and bar band doing a couple of gigs a week is never likely to provide an income sufficient to fulfil all of our new 'grown up' commitments.

As we are all very aware, live gigs, at least at this level, don't pay enormous sums of money, and once petrol expenses have been deducted, a pit-stop for a meal, plus a couple of pints when you get to the gig, there's not going to be very much left over. Just picture the reaction if you get back home to your long-suffering partner only able to admit that you've earned a whole twenty quid for the week. Ultimately, you do it mainly for the love of doing it. It's got into your blood by now, and has become a difficult habit to break. Your significant other, understandably enough, probably doesn't quite see it that way.

So we finally get settled in to our boring 'proper' job, and any thoughts of a guitar-related career have to go on a back burner. The cruel reality is that we are presented with three options. Firstly, we could wake up to the realisation that we are never likely to be a famous pop star, in a fit of pique abandon the guitar once and for all and take the whole kit down to our local secondhand guitar shop, never to be seen or spoken of again.

The second is that we continue playing just the odd gig here or there in a local pub band with some like-minded individuals who are in a similar situation (the new job permitting, of course). This will reduce our musical activity to little more than that of a hobby, at least for now. It's hardly going to be the Rolling Stones, and is a little deflating maybe, but still better than nothing. Or, thirdly, the guitars and amps get stored away in the attic, or the cupboard under the stairs, with some vague notion that we might get back into it one day.

Live gigs don't pay enormous sums of money, and once petrol, meal and pints expenses have been deducted, there's not much left over

Against the odds I was one of those determined souls who did continue, but by now I'd switched my allegiances from Hank to the more edgy styles of Johnny Winter and Jeff Beck. I'd been to see Johnny twice during those years, once at the Royal Albert Hall, and once at the Victoria Palace. I would have been a very happy person indeed if I could have played like him, or even got somewhere close; I even bought a Gibson Firebird I, not unlike Johnny's. My devotion to him subsided a little in time, and Mick Ralphs ended up with the Firebird. I remain a big Johnny Winter fan to this day, and was fortunate enough to catch him at the Sage in Gateshead last year – particularly so since his tragic demise just a few months back.

I'd seen the Yardbirds live at the Streatham Locarno around 1964 or '65, one of the first live gigs I'd ever been to, and the band featured the magical Jeff at the time. I was completely blown away, unable even to applaud, so transfixed was I by this force of nature. I was not merely stunned, but also totally unable to figure out how he got that sound out of a simple Telecaster, and indeed still don't to this day. Unfortunately I couldn't afford a Telecaster, so I bought a Burns ↦

Shortscale Jazz from Selmers in Charing Cross Road. It had six strings but any other similarity to a Tele was purely coincidental.

We are in our thirties now, careering towards the dreaded Big 40. We shouldn't let mere increasing age dissuade us from playing, so it's likely that some of us are still doing occasional pub gigs. Not much money to be made, of course; that doesn't matter, just as long as we can cover our expenses. We are playing a lot better, and it's turned out that the boring job actually pays quite well, so we might also be building up an enviable collection of gear, and some of us have by now have at last managed to buy a decent guitar.

In my case this was a Gibson ES-335, my choice largely prompted by my interest in Otis Rush, BB King and Chuck Berry. But my favourite player during this period in my life was the Grateful Dead's late Jerry Garcia, and I spent vast amounts of time trying to emulate his style, tone, and technique, without much success. Jerry was unique, there's only room in this world for one, so why try to copy him? Still, I learned a way of absorbing a lot of what he did, plus that of Otis, BB and Chuck, put it all together, added a sprinkle of my own vibe, and began to evolve my own sound.

Next month: how the guitarist's life really begins at 40...

Sid's touchstones: BB King, the Grateful Dead, and a cherry red '63 Gibson ES-335

In our thirties we're playing a lot better, and some of us have by now managed to buy a decent guitar

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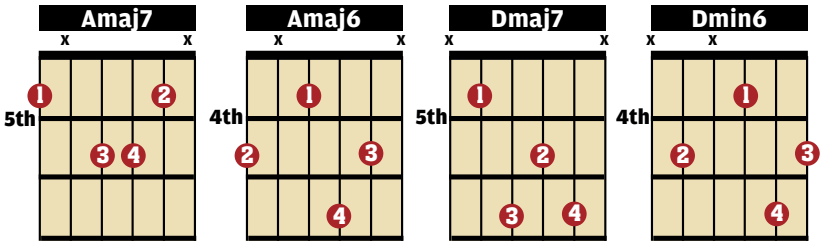
We've got a real finger-twister of a chord progression for you this issue, using extended jazz chords. The basic formula for a chord, of course, is root, third and fifth – but chords in jazz are very often 'extended' to include additional notes such as the seventh and ninth. The progression we're going to use this month is a variation on the standard progression of I, IV, IVm – that is, A, D and Dm in the key of A major. The technique we're working on is co-ordinating the four fretting-hand fingers in a chord progression, in which each chord requires the use of all four fingers – and not only that, but each chord change requires a complete rearrangement of the shape from one chord to the next. Don't be scared...

1 AMAJ7, AMAJ6, DMAJ7 & DMIN6

Now concentrate, because it's chord formula time. The formula for Amaj7, our first chord, is root, major third, fifth and major seventh – that's A, C#, E and G# respectively (although the notes don't have to appear in this order). The formula for the second, Amaj6, is root, major third, fifth and major sixth – in this case A, C#, E and F#. The formula for Dmaj7 is root, major third, fifth and major seventh – D, F#, A and C# – and for Dmin6 it's root, flattened third, fifth and major sixth, which makes D, F#, A and B.

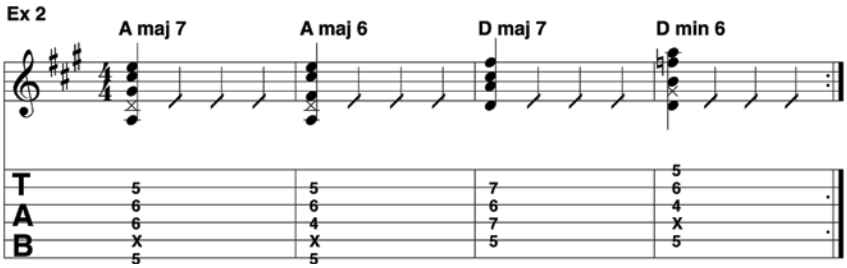
Note that Dmin6 contains the major sixth degree of the scale, B, on the third string at the fourth fret; Dmin b6 would include the minor scale degree of the scale Bb. Try converting Dmin6 into Dmin b6 by moving the first finger one fret lower. Also notice that Amaj6 and Dmin6 are the same fretboard shape, but simply played on different strings.



Be sure to damp the unwanted strings in each chord as shown by the 'x's in the chord diagrams by lightly touching the strings; just use whichever part of the fretting hand seems most convenient.

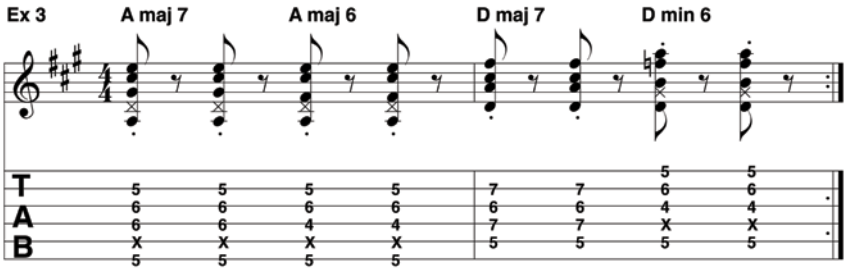
2 CHORD SEQUENCE 4/4 TIME

Usually, when you change from the basic open D chord to the basic open A7, the third finger can be slid down the second string to help 'guide' you into place. Here, though, no 'guide fingers' are possible, so you're going to have to completely rearrange your fretting-hand fingers each time. Relax: you can do it. Strike each chord four times before changing, and – this is important – play as slowly as you like, just as long as the chord change happens in time with the strumming.



3 TWO CHORDS PER BAR 4/4 TIME

This is essentially the same progression as Exercise 1, but played in a more expressive, staccato manner with a more demanding, more frequent chord change. The dots below the chords means play them staccato, cutting each chord short by releasing the fretting-hand's finger pressure just after you've struck each one, but not as far as to make the fingers actually leave the strings. This is a common jazz guitar accompaniment technique. The chord changes occur every two beats, which makes this exercise more demanding than Exercise 2. Practise slowly, then gradually increase the tempo.



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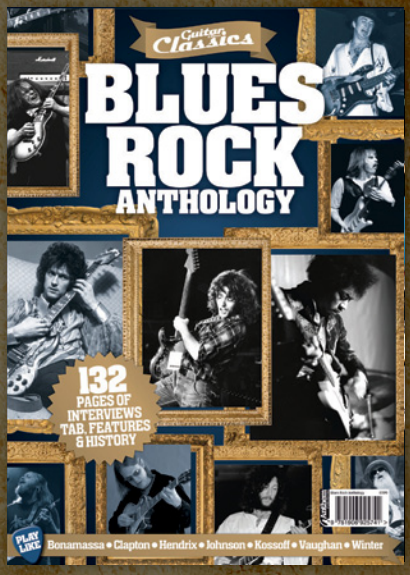

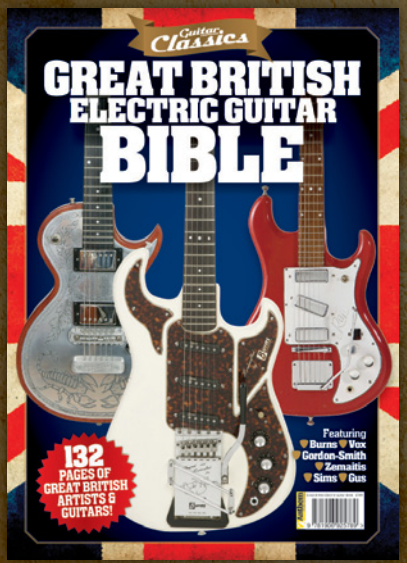

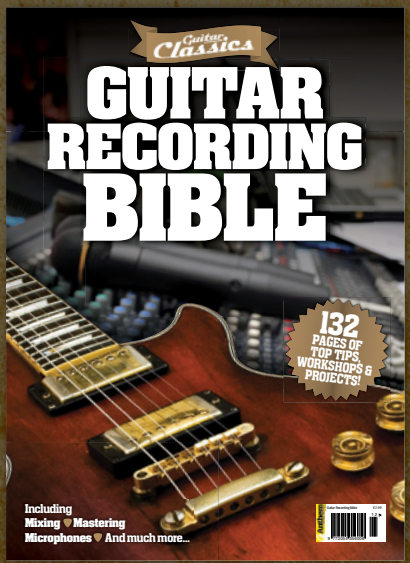

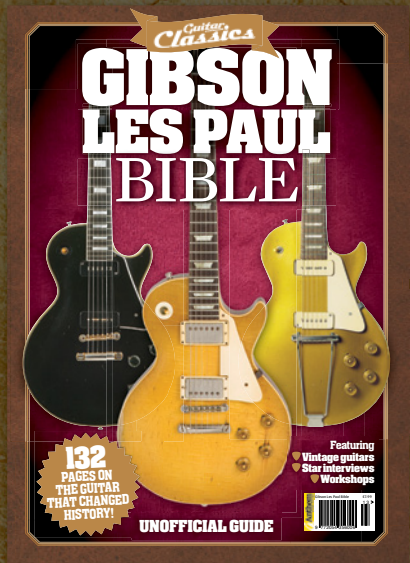

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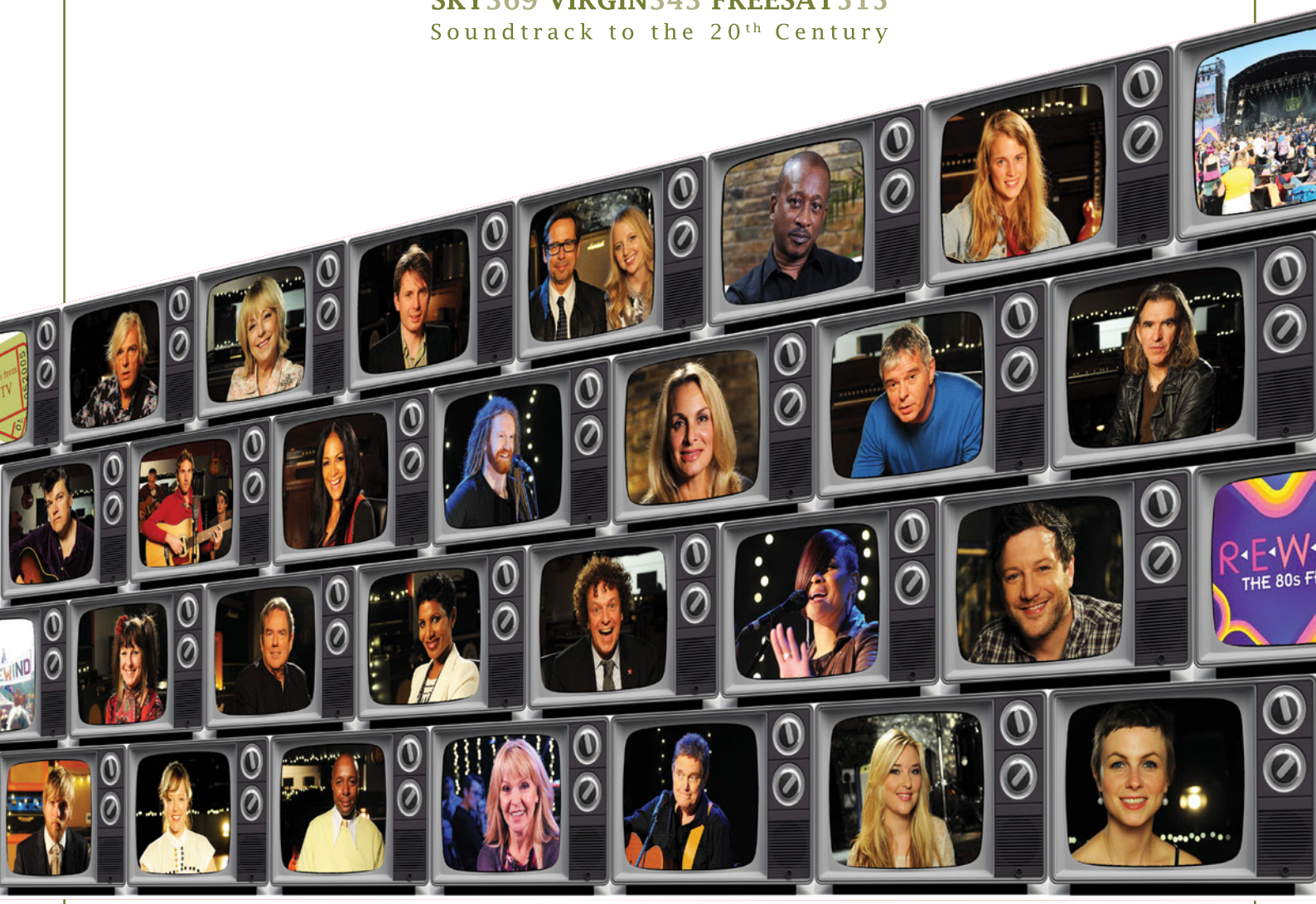

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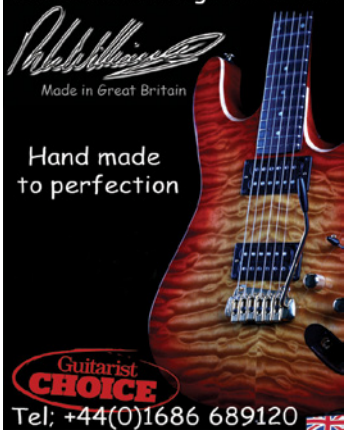

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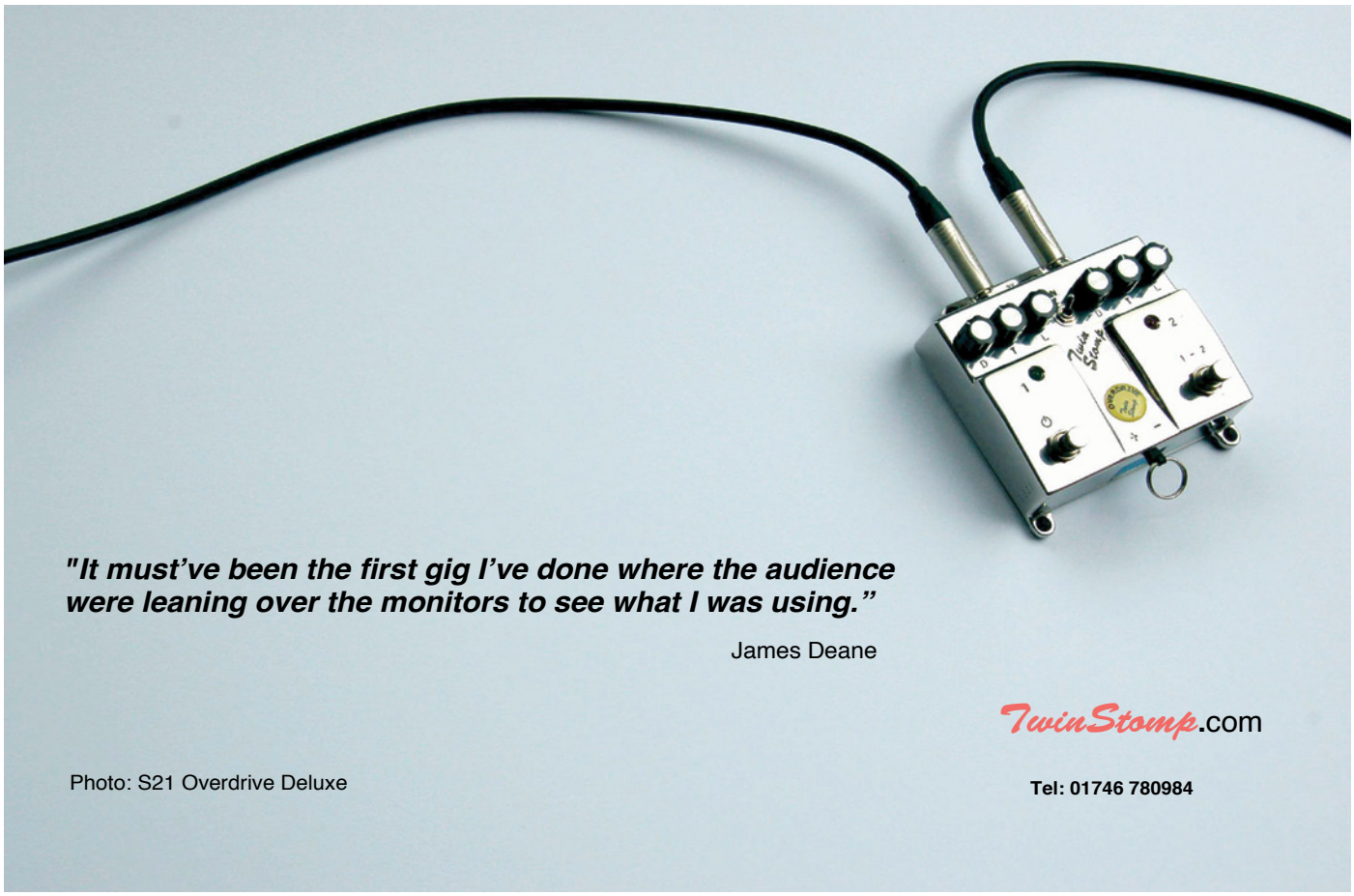

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Richie Kotzen

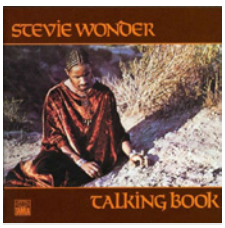
He's known for his rock, fusion and metal abilities but this guitarist's most formative records are also all about soul, R&B, blues and roots

The success of 'supergroup' branded trio Winery Dogs has introduced Richie Kotzen to a whole new audience. Kotzen's amazing fretwork and soulful vocals blend perfectly with the playing of bassist Billy Sheehan and ex-Dream Theater drummer Mike Portnoy on the band's debut, but he's no newcomer. Virtuosic skills landed Kotzen a deal with Shrapnel Records at just 18 years old, and his eponymous debut in appeared 1989. He then revitalised the fortunes of hair-metallers Poison in the '90s and filled the dauntingly shred-tastic shoes of Paul Gilbert in Mr Big from 1997 to 2001. Consistently prolific, he has racked up 18 solo albums, and *The Essential* collection revists solo highlights alongside new tunes, videos and rare demos. Fender released the Kotzen Signature Tele in 1996, he's played it ever since, and it has remained in the catalogue to this day.

Stevie Wonder

TALKING BOOK

It was interesting in my house because my mother was a rock fan but my father was more of an R&B guy, so I got exposed to both. Stevie



Wonder was the first proper concert that I recall going to, I was below 12 for sure, and this left a very strong impression. I loved *Big Brother* but would sing along to all the songs.

Iron Maiden

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

On the opposite side there was Iron Maiden – as far as metal records go, this is my all-time favourite. I would play this every morning before

school, blasting through the house. Luckily my parents were pretty liberal so I got away with it. I was really into the music and the imagery, but it was all very innocent.

Terence Trent D'Arby

INTRODUCING THE HARDLINE ACCORDING TO

I was listening to a lot of blues-based rock singers like Paul Rogers and Rod Stewart, but when I heard Terence he just blew my mind. His voice

encompassed every thing I loved about rock singers, yet he was an R&B singer. It was same feeling I had as a guitarist when I heard Eddie Van Halen for the first time.

Rod Stewart

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

I had this on constant rotation for a while, and as a singer I remember trying to copy Rod's tone and phrasing. It influenced what I wanted my

records to sound like. I liked the rawness and honesty and just the overall vibe. I did my own version of *(I Know) I'm Losing You* based on the one on this record.

Elvis Costello

MIGHTY LIKE A ROSE

I love the songs on this, there's something in the writing and the chords changes and *So Like Candy* has one of my favourite guitar solos – it's clean but

kind of tremolo-y, and I sometimes try to emulate the that style on my records. *Spike* was the other album of his I liked. Melodically and lyrically, I really love what he does.

Prince

SIGN O' THE TIMES

I think this is a really artistic record. It showed the depth of what he's capable of. You can lock the guy alone in a studio and he'll come out with a

record. A musician who can play multiple instruments well, a great performer and singer… I don't think there's another artist that can do all of that at the level he does.

Free

FIRE AND WATER

One of the greatest blues-based rock records of all time. I was a 19 year-old kid about to make my second record and I was looking for a singer.

Shrapnel records boss Mike Varney said he heard a Paul Rogers quality in my voice and suggested I should sing myself. I played the shit out of this record, then became a singer.

Dregs

INDUSTRY STANDARD

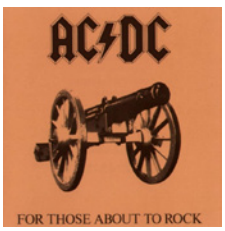
I was a big Steve Morse fan and there was a funky, fusiony edge to this that was far more intricate than most other rock I'd heard. I vividly recall, as a

kid, sitting down with my record player and trying to learn the solo from *Blood Sucking Leeches* note for note. When I could fake my way through it, I felt pretty good!

AC/DC

FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK

I'd put this on and it would energise me the minute I heard the guitar come in. I think the beauty of the title track is how you just know something is



about to happen. The suspense element with that tension and anticipation is what makes it such a great rock song. By the end they're blowing shit up and cannons are firing!

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